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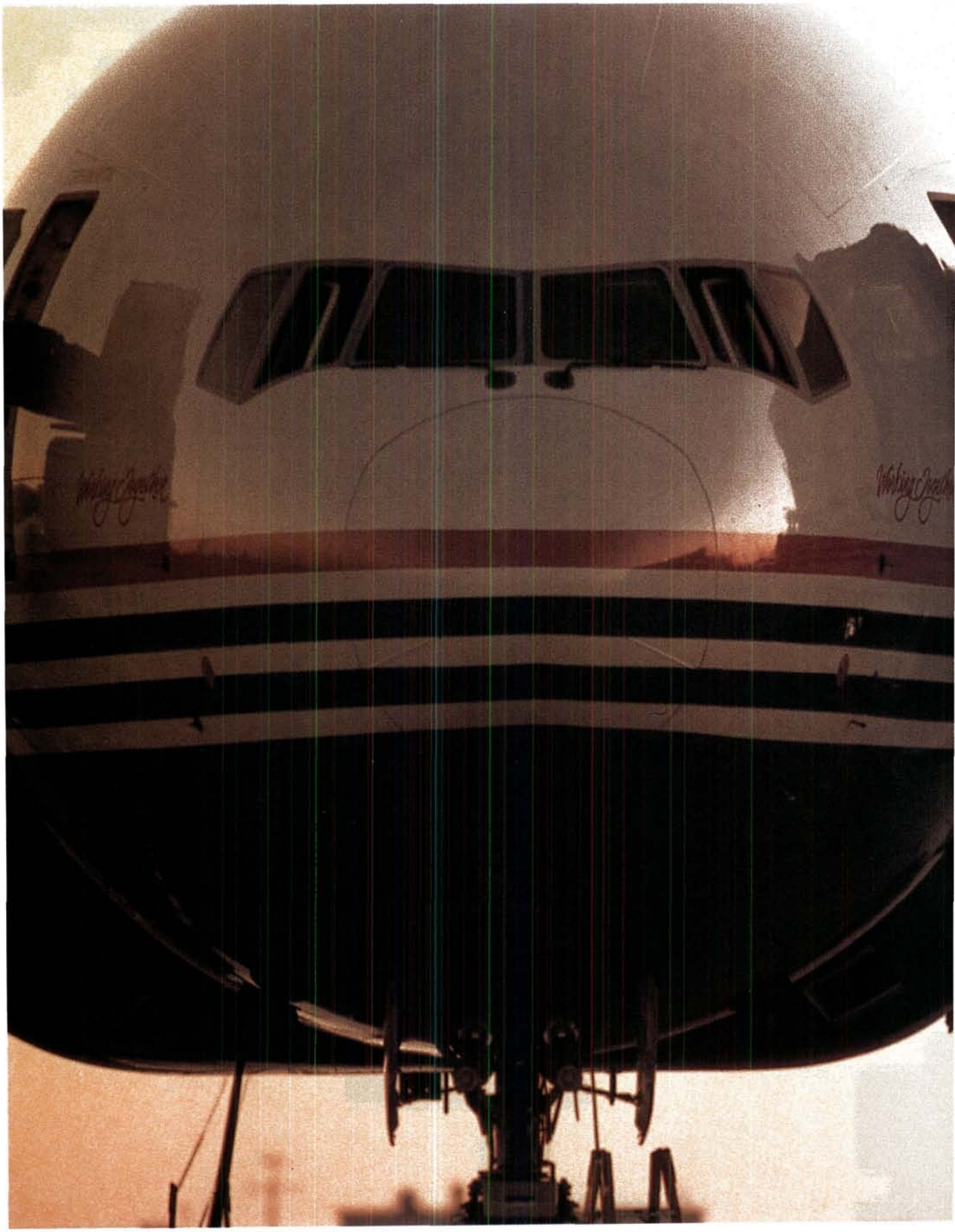

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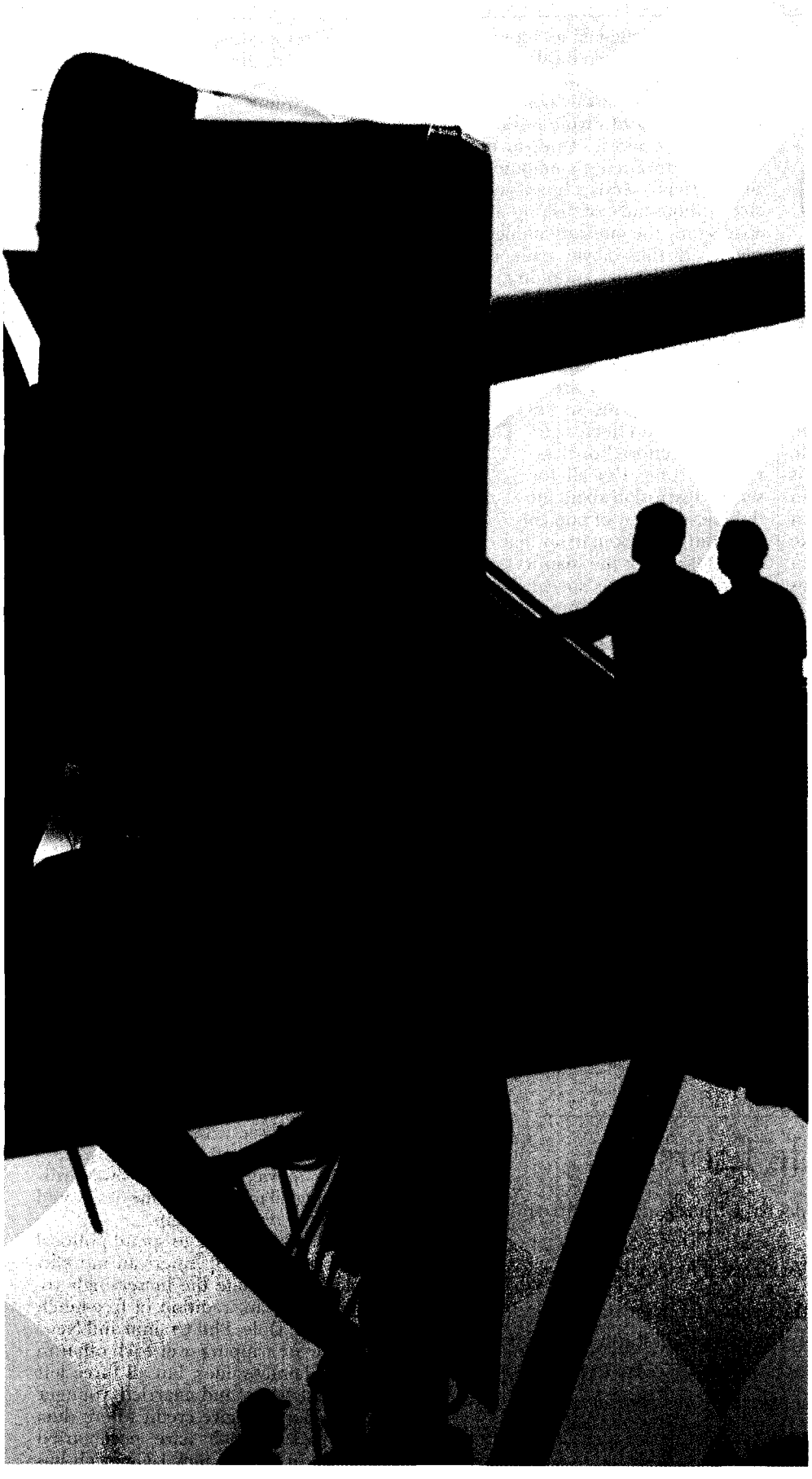

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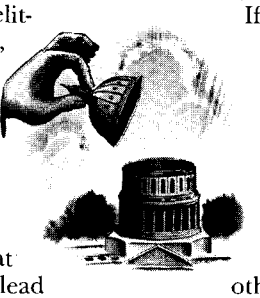
FROM WASHINGTON

Supply-side morality

Much has been made of the suggestion, in Bob Dole's Hollywood-bashing speech, that the celluloid killfest *True Lies* is "friendly to the family." But just as odd, in its own way, is Dole's bestowal of that honor on *Forrest Gump* (which, unlike *True Lies*, Dole has actually seen). When Forrest is a little boy, you may recall, his mother provides sexual service for a sweaty public school official to ensure the enrollment of her semi-retarded son. And the whole thing is played for laughs as young Forrest sits outside listening to the bed creak. Then Forrest grows up to father an illegitimate son via a former free-loving, drug-taking hippie. Maybe Dole was won over by the happy ending: she dies of AIDS for her past sins and marries Forrest shortly before dropping off. (Speaking of divine justice: halfway through the movie, God, to prove His existence to Forrest's embittered paraplegic friend, sends a hurricane that destroys thousands of fishing boats and spares only the one containing the paraplegic. If this movie truly embodied Republican values, wouldn't the paraplegic have been sacrificed for the sake of the fishing industry?)

If you think I'm about to belittle Dole's cleanup campaign, to say that movies are so morally ambiguous, so unpredictable in effect, as to make such efforts hopeless, you're wrong. I'm all for serious discussion about the dubious morality of pop culture. But I *am* about to say that Bob Dole is not the man to lead the discussion. His speech had all the incoherence and phoniness that modern speech-synthesizing technology can muster. In that respect it mirrors the Republican family-values campaign generally.



In his speech, Dole twice said Hollywood moguls "profit" from trash; but then he turned around and said their alibi of "responding to the market" is simply "not true." It was to bolster this latter claim that he suggested that the five top-grossing films of 1994 are family-friendly—even though he had just finished saying that America suffers from the "mainstreaming of deviancy." What ties Dole's logic into such knots? One factor, perhaps, is the standard Republican reluctance to admit that capitalism can do harm. The problem lies not with the market, but with "leaders of the entertainment industry." *Leaders*? What is this, the Soviet economy circa 1950? If markets are the wonders of efficiency that Republicans say, then the hidden hand will find a way to link rape-and-murder artists with rape-and-murder consumers. Capital is fungible, remember? If today's "leaders" turn down lucrative projects, money will flow to other entrepreneurs—tomorrow's "leaders."

Certainly a few CEOs could slightly, briefly alter the texture of popular culture. But in the long run, a supply-side approach won't work. (When will Republicans learn?) If you're going to use "shame" as a weapon, you'd better aim at the demand side.

Here complications ensue. First, consumers can only be shamed by people they respect. Bob Dole can't much change inner-city musical tastes (that's a job for Michael Jordan) or the demand for Oliver Stone's leftist movies. Dole might change the demand for mainstream mayhem movies, like *Die Hard With a Vengeance*. But denouncing these movies would bring a second complication, and it isn't just that Bruce Willis is a Republican. The larger problem is that trying to shame members of *your own* constituency—the only people you can effectively shame in the first place—may alienate them. Some parents don't like being told they were derelict to let a 10-year-old see a Bruce Willis movie. That's why actually *criticizing* a top-grossing movie, rather than awkwardly embracing all top-grossing movies, would be an act of real leadership.

Of course, for Dole to spend political capital on behalf of American morality would be to violate the increasingly robust Republican tradition of free-lunch moralizing. Dole, Phil Gramm and Newt Gingrich are tripping over each other to endorse family values, but all three left their first wives and married younger babes. (But let's give credit where due: Dole and Gingrich have never tried to invest in a porn flick.) Gingrich has even called for the return of Victorian "shame." Well it's true that Victorian

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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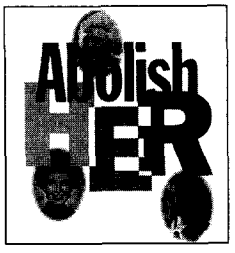

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CORRESPONDENCE

Hell to pay

To the editors:

Your cover story comparing the levels of U.S. budget chaos to the rings of Dante's Inferno ("The Budget Inferno," May 29) was outstanding. Steve Tidrick did, however, miss one additional extension of the metaphor. I had learned that the lowest rings of Dante's hell were reserved for those who do nothing in times of moral crisis. Though it is always easier to lay blame on our government officials, we taxpayers probably fit this description better than anyone, for it is we who neglect to change the system by removing the career subsidizers in Congress. We're not going to fix any of the higher rings without fixing this one.

LEE KANTZ
Chicago, Illinois

To the editors:

I was glad to see Steve Tidrick point out the subsidy enjoyed by logging companies that cut trees in our national forests. In doing the number-crunching for our shareholders' report, we found that money-losing timber sales overseen by the U.S. Forest Service cost taxpayers $614 million in 1993. Simultaneously, they did tremendous damage to rivers, streams, wildlife and scenery.

Sadly, there are other programs that damage both our public lands and our wallets. One is mining. Thanks to the Mining Law of 1872, mining companies (most of them foreign) still pay nothing in royalties for the gold, silver and other hardrock minerals they dig out of the public's western lands. Another privileged group is corporate ranchers, who are allowed to graze their herds on public lands at below-market rates. The environmental toll of this overgrazing has been documented repeatedly.

The budget resolutions now before Congress call for deep cuts in a lot of programs. Yet there is not a word about ending these three subsidies that damage our lands and add to the federal deficit. It is time the press turned a bright light on this hypocrisy.

G. JON ROUSH
President, The Wilderness Society
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

In "The Budget Inferno," Steve Tidrick describes the late, great Stanley S. Surrey (1910-84) as an "economist." Stanley was many things: assistant Treasury secretary for tax policy under Kennedy and Johnson, revered Harvard professor and the patron saint of liberal tax reformers around the world. But one thing he was not was an economist. Today, when Stanley's frequently expressed worries about the ongoing rightward tilt of the economics profession have proven prescient, when many of that profession's leading theorists seem to have abandoned tax fairness as a desirable goal, to tar Stanley as an "economist" is particularly unfortunate. In fact, he was a lawyer.

ROBERT S. MCINTYRE
Washington, D.C.

America the beautiful

To the editors:

Margaret Talbot ("Recycled," May 29) characterizes Germans as small-minded, intolerant order-fetishists. While her anecdotes may well be true, it remains open whether they reveal a larger truth or contribute much to public enlightenment.

All foreigners have horror stories to tell about their host countries. A small sample of American anecdotes, which I delight in telling my German compatriots over a drink because it makes us feel mightily superior:

Once, in the United States, when the grass-cutting contractor failed to show up for two consecutive weeks, we received an anonymous, typed note from a concerned soul, upbraiding us for spoiling the neighborhood's appearance.

While it is quite easy in the United States to acquire crack in the street, the outdoor consumption of beer is permitted only surreptitiously: to stave off moral deprivation and prevent the public from being exposed to disreputable influences, the can needs to be camouflaged in a small paper bag. Likewise, a woman daring to take off her bikini top at the beach would be arrested without delay for indecent exposure.

On highways it happens with great regularity that didactic drivers block the passing lane, not because they are passing, but because they travel at the speed limit and nobody should want to pass them.

What do these examples tell us about Americans or America? Precisely very little.

FRANZ BAUMANN
Washington, D.C.

A cut above

To the editors:

Although somewhat informative on the circumcision debate ("Unkindest Cut," May 29) Stephen Rodrick chose to mock the National Organization of Restoring

"The Clinton administration has promised to stop concealing our politics and our history, and maybe Carpenter's engrossing and thorough case will make the government—for once—live up to its word."
—Jonathan Kwitny

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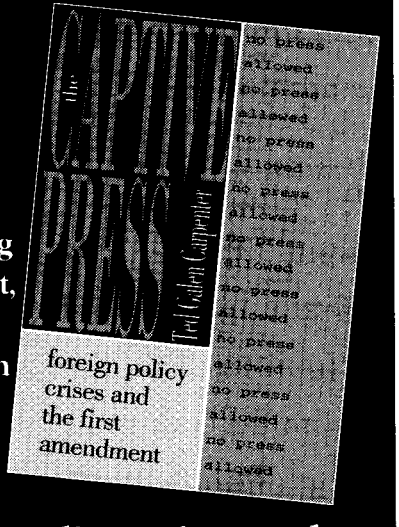
—Eric Alterman



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Men. I don't see what's so "kooky" about wanting a fully functional penis that offers a natural protection to the glans and doesn't require lubricants to be stimulated. Foreskin restoration provides a definitive physical function, unlike breast reconstruction, for example, which offers only an aesthetic function. Also, foreskin restoration is hardly an ideology, it's a desire. It is easy to ridicule the restoration movement as long as you omit (as Rodrick did) the foreskin's sensual, mobile and protective function plus the fact that twelve to fifteen square inches of erogenous tissue are missing from the adult circumcised penis. Rodrick's tactic of omission is the same used by the American doctors to convince parents that the foreskin is insignificant in size and has no function.

RICHARD DESEABRA
Director, National Organization of Restoring Men
New York, New York

Tyrants

To the editors:

In "Closing the Doors" (The Editors, May 29), you mar an otherwise sound defense of President Clinton's Cuba policy with the statement that "our anathematization of him [Castro] was born as much out of antipathy to tyranny as such, as out of antipathy to Soviet tyranny." It is a pleasing thought, to be sure. Unfortunately, it is also irrelevant to your argument and demonstrably false. U.S. complicity in the overthrow of the democratically elected governments of Jacobo Arbenz (Guatemala, 1954) and Salvador Allende (Chile, 1973) are proof enough that we, as a nation, do not always prefer democracy to tyranny. Our silence in the face of the atrocities committed by the (anti-Communist) Argentine military from 1976 to 1982 is yet another example. I have left out three continents entirely, and several administrations, all replete with examples of our selective disdain for tyranny. Our demonization of Castro is certainly defensible as opposition to tyranny per se, but was definitely not motivated by it.

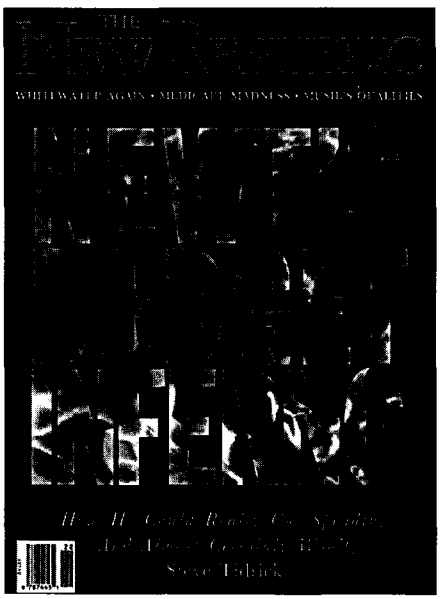
JEFFREY S. SILVER
Arlington, Virginia

Secrets

To the editors:

We appreciate Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s kind words about *The Secret World of American Communism* ("The Party Circuit," May 29). We would, however, like to respond to his challenge to the appropriateness of our identification of Laurence Duggan as a possible Soviet source in the 1930s. Both Whittaker Chambers and Hede Massing independently identified Duggan as someone they knew was involved in the Communist underground in the mid-1930s. Massing stated that she personally recruited Duggan while Chambers reported that his network attempted to do so, but Duggan informed his recruiter that he was already in contact with a different Soviet network, i.e., Massing's.

Schlesinger bases his confidence in Duggan on his contacts with him in the 1940s. Both Massing and Chambers suggested that Duggan was a cautious sympathizer but not a convinced ideologue. He could easily have become disillusioned with communism—as had Massing and Chambers—by the time Schlesinger knew him. Such disillusionment



might explain his suicide in 1948 just after the FBI interviewed him about his activities in the 1930s: remorse for what he had done and despair at having it revealed.

HARVEY KLEHR
JOHN EARL HAYNES
Atlanta, Georgia

To the editors:

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s review of *The Secret World of American Communism* reveals more about his views of historical scholarship and his own role in shaping it than it does about the book or American communism. Although Schlesinger points out that the "pattern of release" of Soviet documents regarding the relationship between the Kremlin and the CPUSA has been "confusing and unpredictable" because of the "chaotic" state of the archives, he asserts that the "documents now available in Russia prove beyond any question that the American party functioned as an instrument of Soviet espionage." Documents by themselves, however, never determine historical truth; they must be accompanied by context and rigorous arguments.

But Schlesinger is only half loyal to documentary evidence anyway. He is content to agree with the authors that the documents prove the espionage role of the CPUSA when their claims support his own works, but he is quick to disagree when they exaggerate the importance of the CPUSA.

Thus, such statements as "The repudiation of Stalinism in what was once the Soviet empire has plainly not blighted the romance of Stalinism at home, especially among young scholars who never had, as my generation did, the sour experience of dealing personally with American Communists," position him to make outrageous claims such as, "Looking back, I don't think that the CPUSA had much influence on anything. The New Deal, American foreign policy, the CIO: all would have evolved in the same way if the CPUSA had never existed." This suggests Schlesinger believes that historical scholarship is useful when it supports his own experience and memory, but not so when it challenges them.

KRISTER KNAPP
Boston, Massachusetts

Lichtenberg, again

To the editors:

Ian Abrams's inability to find Georg Christoph Lichtenberg in his electronic reference works (Correspondence, June 12) tells more about the quality of these works than the reputation of this writer, a luminary of the German Enlightenment and one of the rare German authors with a sense of humor. A prominent scientist, he discovered in 1777, according to the *Brittanica*, the principles underlying modern xerographic copying. He is also the author of many literary works, including a collection of *Aphorisms*.

The latter contains the following gem that I like to quote whenever the occasion presents itself: *Wer in sich selbst verliebt ist, hat wenigstens bei seiner Liebe den Vorteil, dass er nicht viele Nebenbuhler erhalten wird.* Or: "Whoever is in love with himself at least enjoys in his love the advantage of not having many rivals."

RICHARD PIPES
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to less than 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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American leadership in world affairs is expensive. Until you consider the alternative.

During this century, America has played a proud and unparalleled role in the leadership of formal alliances and informal coalitions to vanquish tyrants, extend human freedom, and craft the rules and institutions of commerce and peace.

The cost of our leadership in world affairs has been high; we honor the profound sacrifices made in the exercise of that leadership. At the same time, we know that, for the realization of our fundamental principles and the welfare of our country, the cost of withdrawal from leadership — or of its assumption by other nations — would have been intolerable. Through two World Wars and five decades of post-War conflict between the Soviet bloc and the Western alliance, America's role had been central and irreplaceable. In the uncertainties and conflicts that lie ahead, we foresee no diminution — indeed, a likely extension — of the call for American leadership in international affairs.

It is in the interest of human progress, and the particular interest of our own nation, that America continue to answer that call to leadership. In fact, America's national and international interests are mutually reinforcing. In the developed world, American commitment to free trade in goods and ideas, and to the entrenchment and protection of democracy, strengthens our and our partners' economies, the well-being of our people, and our political and strategic infrastructures. In the developing world, American commitment to human rights and to the relief of human suffering, to the creation and sustenance of democratic institutions, and to defense against extremism, ultranationalism and expansionism, is not only morally compelling but yields alliances, markets and regional security regimes vital to American economic and political interests.

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906 in part to spur U.S. action against the oppression of Jews in czarist Russia, has consistently advocated our nation's leadership in world affairs. A participant in the Versailles conference of 1919 and consultant to the American delegation to the San Francisco conference that chartered the United Nations in 1945, the American Jewish Committee has long recognized the singular role of the United States as a defender of freedom, protector of human rights, and proponent of peaceful relations between states.

As Americans, inheritors of the world's longest and most successful experiment in constitutional democracy, we know the provenance of our freedoms — the struggle to found a nation free of religious persecution, intolerance and political oppression; we know, as well, that our nation's struggle for freedom is incomplete and ongoing. As Jews, inheritors of an ancient and noble tradition of laws and culture, whose communities in other lands have been decimated by political and religious decree, we cherish the American ideal of liberty, a beacon of hope to all the world.

For these reasons — America's role and investment in shaping the modern world; the dangers of alternative or absent leadership; the economic, political and strategic benefits of active international engagement with both the developed and developing worlds; and the history, virtue and motivating power of the American ideal — we commend our Government's continued dedication to the projection of American leadership in world affairs. To that end, **we urge the following:**

■ **Vigorous resistance to neo-isolationist calls for American withdrawal or retreat from international commitments.** American economic, political and strategic interests cannot be isolated or insulated from world affairs; their successful engagement in world affairs are America's guarantor of prosperity and peace.

■ **An understanding of the cost-effectiveness of U.S. foreign aid and a strong commitment to maintain it as an efficient instrument of foreign policy.** Reduced in real-dollar terms in recent budgets to less than 1 percent of Federal spending — and the lowest, as a percentage of GNP, among major industrialized nations — U.S. foreign aid serves to safeguard America's political and economic interests abroad and spurs the development of new markets, generates American jobs (with 3 out of 4 aid dollars spent at home), and helps ease foreign crises that could escalate into instability and military conflict.

■ **Continued U.S. leadership in efforts to resolve regional conflicts** in areas of vital economic, political and strategic interest; to **bar the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;** and to **combat international terrorism** that threatens America, Israel, moderate Arab states, and the values and institutions of modern civilization. America's role in the pursuit of Arab-Israeli reconciliation, and in the development of regional economic and security arrangements to promote Middle East peace, has been, and continues to be, indispensable.

■ **Continued U.S. leadership, active participation, and appropriate investment in multilateral and bilateral institutions,** including international lending agencies, trade and health organizations, and the United Nations. These institutions are valuable tools through which the United States, with vital security and economic interests across the globe, seeks global consensus on issues of national importance.

■ **The protection of international human rights as an essential component of U.S. foreign policy,** reflecting America's deepest values while advancing its interests in a safer world. Indeed, at the founding conference of the United Nations 50 years ago, it was American Jewish Committee representatives Joseph Proskauer and Jacob Blaustein who argued persuasively that governments which respect human rights in their own countries are less likely to upset regional and global stability.

This message, one of a series on public policy issues, was adopted by the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee at its 89th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., on May 3, 1995.

The American Jewish Committee

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 26, 1995

THERE HE GOES AGAIN

The pattern has occurred before. An important public issue emerges that challenges liberal orthodoxy. President Clinton articulates the new idea and seems to grasp its essential point. Then he waits, afraid to disturb his own constituency. Republicans exploit the issue and see political results. Clinton panics, initiates a study group and includes virtually every position in it. The Republicans expropriate the new idea. Clinton's study group divides the Democrats and offers a compromise that finds a middle ground among the Democrats and that leaves the country bemused.

Welcome to the budget debate. Or welfare reform. Or gays in the military. Or health-care reform. Or Bosnia. Or reinventing government. Or ... well, you name it. They're all examples of Clinton's understanding a new policy paradigm, even praising it, but then fudging and fumbling it over to the GOP. This pathetic pattern suggests an old lesson in politics. Either embrace a new position with a vengeance, or oppose it clearly and passionately. And always stay ahead of the game.

With affirmative action, the pattern is particularly tragic. Many Democrats have long been urging a principled rethinking of the generation-old policy. In a leak to *The New York Times*, the president seemed to comprehend that there is a "moral cost" to programs that explicitly discriminate on the basis of race or gender. By this, he presumably meant that racial discrimination, whether benign or malign, is inherently self-defeating; that a rigid insistence on racial balance polarizes civic community; that if the legacy of Jim Crow once justified reverse discrimination, that justification must surely now be over.

So Clinton sets up a commission. The deadlines for its report pass by, with all the sad inevitability of Ira Magaziner's grim tome. Phil Gramm launches his campaign with a promise to abolish affirmative action; Bob Dole comes on board; so does sometime set-aside supporter Pete Wilson. Clinton becomes so engrossed in the inside politics of the debate that he forgets what he was supposed to be doing in the first place.

As often, the president gets some things right. The task force is staffed by more neos (George Stephanopoulos, William Galston and Joel Klein) than paleos (Deval Patrick, Christopher Edley and Harold Ickes). And the report seems to include some new thinking. According to the *Times*, the draft says there are "problems with some purchasing programs that reserve Federal contracts for companies owned by blacks or women." It also "lays out standards for acceptable affirmative action": race or sex can be considered as "one among several factors" and numbers can be used, but as "goals rather than straitjackets or quotas." And the report specifically questions the set-asides that exist in "more than half" of all federal procurements in some industries and regions. Not the loudest of clarion calls, but a start.

Then the other Clinton pipes up. In a meeting on May 23 with black business leaders, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, Clinton made clear that, while some of his aides favored major change, he himself didn't. At the meeting, participants pointed out that, after the Supreme Court struck down a city government scheme that set aside 30 percent of contracts for "Negroes, Spanish-speaking, Orientals, Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts," contracts allotted to those minorities dropped to 8 percent. "That's the most telling point," Clinton responded. "We need to find ways to broaden [these programs] so they won't be subject to so much criticism."

Broaden these programs? The solution to reverse discrimination is to divide the country still further and start a fiercer fight for the civil spoils? That Clinton allegedly said this in reference to the 30-percent set-aside plan is particularly bizarre. Of all racial preferences, strict set-asides are the least friendly to the principles espoused in Clinton's draft report. The report says "consideration of race or sex is permissible" sometimes, if it is narrowly tailored to overcome the effects of discrimination, to cure "a manifest imbalance" in the workplace or to promote diversity at a college. Set-asides for Aleuts in Virginia meet none of these criteria.

We don't know what the president will finally propose, but we're not hopeful. He has already lost his chance to champion a dramatic Democratic reconfiguration of affirmative action, win widespread public support and use the bounce to push measures that would really help beleaguered minorities: improving schools, reforming welfare, tackling crime. So he'll muddle on, offending liberals and moderates, blacks and whites alike, fissuring the Democrats further and allowing the Republicans to make political capital out of a genuinely important issue. It would be pitiful, if it weren't so deeply depressing. •

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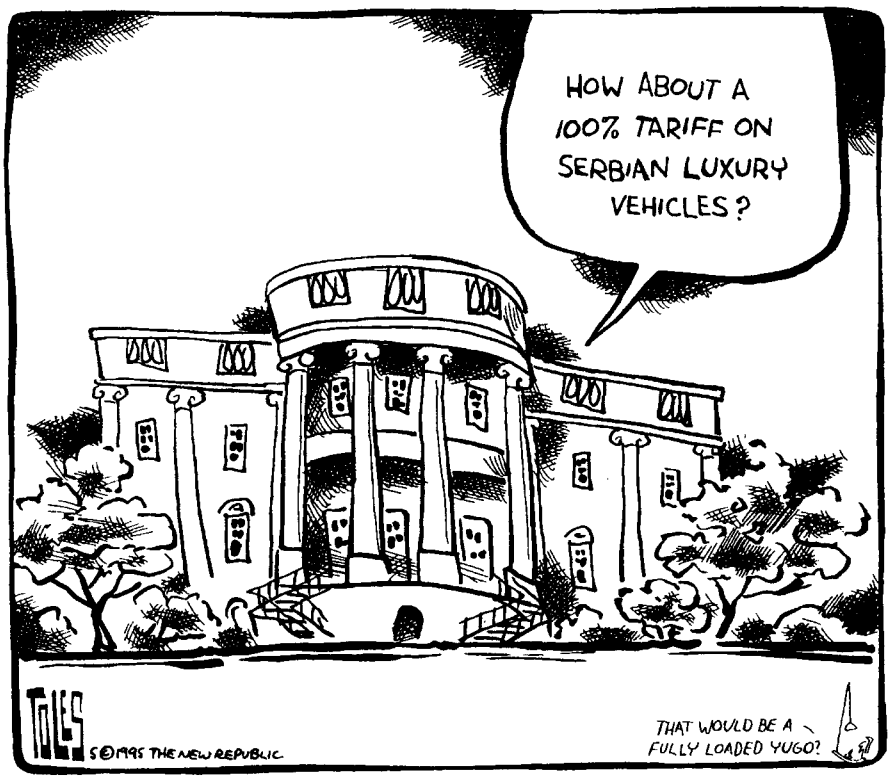
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: The city of Los Angeles announced a $4 million revamping of its jury system that included the issuing of mandatory thank-you notes to jurors.... Illinois prison guard Michael Moreci, who shouted at a fellow driver while stuck in a traffic jam, "I beat up guys like you for a living," was arrested when the other driver turned out to be federal Judge Sam Amirante and his passenger the wife of a Chicago Bears lineman.... Two hundred eighty gallons of tar balls washed ashore on the North Carolina Coast.... Police in Queens, New York, arrested Majid Alajani after discovering that a search for his allegedly kidnapped son was merely a ploy to locate more quickly his car, which had been stolen.... Watergate felon G. Gordon Liddy pledged $30,000 from proceeds of his "Packed and Stacked" calendar, which features heavily armed, scantily clad young women, to benefit Oklahoma City bombing victims and their families.



THIS ONE WE DIDN'T OPEN:

Simon & Schuster
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Michael Kinsley
THE NEW REPUBLIC
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(Address label on a package delivered to TNR's offices last week.)

GRAMM WATCH: Poor Phil Gramm. Having forfeited his credentials as a Hollywood-basher, he is now losing his silver badge as a "law and order" Republican. Former TNR reporter-researcher Will Saletan, writing in the current issue of *Mother Jones*, has revealed that in 1979 and 1980 Representative Gramm lobbied parole officers to release early three felons, including William Doyle, a convicted burglar and drug dealer. Once out of jail, Doyle resumed dealing drugs and has been jailed three times. Gramm, who excoriated Michael Dukakis in 1988 for vetoing bills "providing mandatory sentences for drug pushers," claimed that he had "never heard of Bill Doyle, much less met or spoken with him" and denied having "written or authorized any letter" on his behalf. When *Mother Jones* released letters from Gramm to Doyle's parole officer, Gramm changed his story, charging that a former employee had intervened on Doyle's behalf entirely without his knowledge. But both Doyle and his brother, former Pentagon official and West Point graduate James Doyle, told Saletan that they personally discussed the case with Gramm. "His staff did it, but he put his name on the line," Doyle told Saletan. Doyle said that he "met him socially and I thanked him." Gramm's letters also suggest personal involvement. In an April 16 letter to Doyle's parole officer, Gramm writes of William Doyle that he has "met his family and know his brother" and "have personally interviewed numerous individuals who have known Mr. Doyle." Gramm has offered no explanation for trying to spring the other two felons, Arnold Gene Tate and Bobby Curry.

NO KIDDING:

20 THE BOSTON GLOBE • THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 1995

Women aren't making Page 1 much, a survey finds

—*The Boston Globe*, June 1 ... page 20.
(Thanks to Ellen Carley Frechette of Medfield, Massachusetts.)

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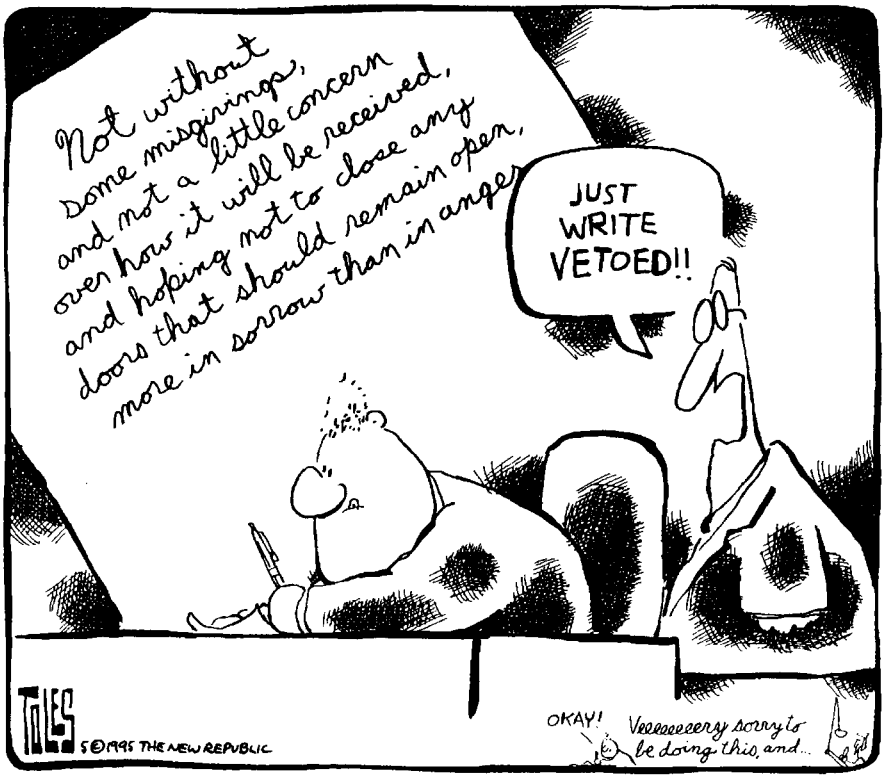
NEWT LOVES FUNGUS: Over the past few weeks, rancher-turned-congressman Richard Pombo of California, head of the task force rewriting the Endangered Species Act, has been trekking across the South and West for a series of town meetings. At each stop he rounds up ornery loggers and farmers and shrimpers angry about effects of the act. Experts, on the other hand, aren't welcome; Pombo canceled a meeting after Maryland Democrat Wayne Gilchrest invited the noted Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson and the director of the Atlanta zoo. Who should suddenly intervene to stop this high-handed abuse of newfound Republican power? None other than Newt Gingrich himself, stirred by his abiding love of all things biological and zoological. "There are enormous interests we have as human beings in maintaining biological diversity," Gingrich scolded the task force. "This is not just about large vertebrates.... This is also about the fungi and the various things that produce the medicine of the future." For a break from the upcoming book tour, Newt, perhaps a trip to the Brazilian rainforest?


Not without some misgivings, and not a little concern over how it will be received, and hoping not to close any doors that should remain open, more in sorrow than in anger
JUST WRITE VETOED!!
TOLES
©1995 THE NEW REPUBLIC
OKAY! Veeeeeery sorry to be doing this, and...

FINAL STATUS: Some readers have questioned just what we meant by our assertion ("This Year in Jerusalem," TNR, June 5) that Talpiot, the Jerusalem neighborhood where the U.S. embassy would be built, was "a venerable Jewish neighborhood." Wasn't what is now Talpiot once actually an Arab neighborhood? The answer is no. Talpiot was deserted, like much of Palestine until Zionist economic activity attracted both Jews and Arabs to the country. Much as the Zionists built Tel Aviv as a Jewish addition to Jaffa, they contemplated several Jewish additions to Jerusalem, in which the Jews were already the largest group. What was to become Talpiot had no Arabs living or working there. A plan for this Jewish suburb was initiated in 1909 by Arthur Ruppin, a functionary of the Zionist organization, and preliminary work continued until 1913. Then came World War I, and work stopped. By 1920 Talpiot and its environs were still empty. By 1921, however, the first houses for Jews were being built. In 1929 the neighborhood was populated with enough Jews to have been attacked by Arab rioters who left many dead. (Nobel Laureate S. Y. Agnon, who lived in Talpiot at the time, wrote about this experience in his short story "The Sign.") When the 1949 armistice took effect, the neighborhood was formally ceded to Israeli control, no less a Jewish area, in fact, than Tel Aviv. The status of Talpiot—like the status of most of Jerusalem—does not await the outcome of "final status" talks. That status is obvious. The U.S. refusal to acknowledge this rather simple fact, in Talpiot no less, does not pacify but only encourages the rejectionists in the Arab world and among the Palestinians, especially.

THE HOMECOMING II: The latest AIDS statistics from the Centers for Disease Control confirm the worst predictions of our recent cover-stories (see "The Homecoming" and "The White Cloud," TNR, June 5). For gay black men in the South, the number of AIDS cases has doubled in five years; in New York, the numbers have jumped 49 percent in a year. In San Francisco, 53 percent; in Los Angeles, 48 percent. This suggests massive increases in infection among these groups around ten years ago. Black men now have the highest rate of homosexually transmitted AIDS: 37.3 cases per 100,000, a 79 percent increase from the 20.8 in 1989. The rate among Latino men rose 61 percent, to 22.6 per 100,000 in 1994 from 14 in 1989. Heaven knows what rate of asymptomatic HIV-infection there now is in these populations.

CLINTON WATCH:

REPORT TO CLINTON FAULTS PROGRAMS TO AID MINORITIES
—*The New York Times*, May 31.

White House review finds affirmative action is justified
—*Detroit Free Press*, May 31.

(Thanks to David Chait of West Bloomfield, Michigan.)

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Free Speech vs. Moral Decline, again.

BOB (YAWN) DOLE

By Roger Rosenblatt

"Oh no, please. Please don't, Bob. I beg of you. I'll pay you. How much not to open your trap? A million? Five? Your campaign could *use* a cool $5 million, Bob. What do you say?"

Not that I have $5 million to spare, but I would have done anything to prevent Senator/presidential candidate Robert Dole from delivering his I-hate-Hollywood speech last week. He was compelled to do it, of course. Some half-clever dimwit on his staff told him that the ploy would be politically successful; and it was. As the night follows the night, so the tired, dreary, predictable, meaningless, formulaic public argument cranked up like a barnacle-encrusted outboard motor. Chugga ... chugga ... chugga ... chuggachuggachugga.... Yes! The papers tear up page one. Oprah, Donahue and Charlie Rose get on the horn. "Bosnia schamzznia!" cries the TV evening news. "This is major! This is boss!"

Are the movie moguls destroying American life? *Yes*!

But do they have First Amendment rights? *Yes*!

Then should we shame them into rectitude? *Yes*!

I watched Norman Lear of People for the American Way on "Nightline" as he tried his hardest to fight the fight one more time. On his sweet, intelligent face sincerity wrestled with boredom and disgust. Did he really have to be on the front line again, in the War of the Obvious? His opposite corner, presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, on the other hand, was knee-deep in hog heaven. A chance to sound upright, thought Pat. An opportunity to take the high road, with Jesus at my side. He invoked the company of Jesus. One could almost hear Jesus mutter, "Jesus!"

Ted Koppel was in his own journalistic paradise. As my heart sank, I imagined each of "Nightline"'s participants poised above those identifying lines used on afternoon talk shows. Under Norman: "Can't believe that he has to acknowledge Pat Buchanan as a person." Under Pat: "Can't believe that he is being acknowledged as a person." Under Ted: "Can't believe what a cinch his job is."

Slept fitfully that night. Dreamt that I was drunk in a bar in west Texas. Gerald Levin, the chairman of Time Warner, was standing at the jukebox spinning Dr. Dre's gangsta rap version of the Bill of Rights, when the earth beneath me thudded (as in the gratuitously violent movie *Jurassic Park*), and William J. Bennett squeezed through the swinging doors, singing "The Book of Virtues"—"Oh, I wonder, wonder, who, bee-doo, who...."

Sure enough, when I awoke, soaked in sweat, before me lay an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* by C. DeLores Tucker and (yes) William J. Bennett.

And of what are these two authors writing? Their confrontational visit to the executives of Time Warner.

To shame them into rectitude? Yes!

And on what sort of ears did their appeal fall? "Deaf."

After all the many things that Bennett accomplished as Secretary of Education and drug czar—overseeing two problem areas that were virtually eliminated during his tenure—I stand second to none in defending his right to bloviate relentlessly for America's moral correctness. But, could we not, as a people, find a way to cut to the chase whenever someone like Dole gets a bright idea and yet another tired, predictable debate rears its drowsy head? After all, the Free Speech versus Everybody's Degradation argument is but one of several time-devouring intellectual contests that might take both a neater and a more entertaining form.

How about a national catechism? A lay, not a religious, catechism in which any number of stirring questions could be proposed and answered quickly and accurately. Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings or Dan Rather (sorry, Connie) could recite the questions over a loudspeaker in the open-air Cathedral of Civil Religion, and the American People, rising as one, could respond:

What should we do to the national debt? "*Reduce*!"

The federal budget must be...? "*Leaner*!"

And what else? "*Meaner*!"

If we fail to control the economy, who will pay? "*Our children and grandchildren*!"

What else do we not want our children to bear? "*Children*!"

What sort of politics do we deplore? "*As usual*!"

What sort of box is the Middle East? "*Tinder*!"

What sort of pulpit does the president have? "*Bully*!"

What sort of discussion is missing today? "*Rational*!"

And...? "*Civil*!"

What don't we have any more of? "*Heroes*!"

At what of society is obscenity tearing? "*The fabric*!"

Come again? "*The* very *fabric*."

Picture it. Say, once a month, the good people of the United States would gather in the vast amphitheater to shout out their collective answers to the questions of the day. (What sort of questions are they? Troubling!) The entire ceremony would take but a few minutes. Everyone would feel dutiful and relieved. There would be plenty of time left for shopping.

In fact, Bennett and Tucker may have inadvertently started us off on the national catechism in their op-ed piece. The article contains several passages that easily could be translated into catechism form. The authors themselves might kick off the event by reading from their piece aloud:

What should Americans not do toward "decivilization"? "*Slide*!"

What is the breadth of the "consensus" that our culture has grown "vulgar, coarse and violent"? "*Wide*!"

For whose "sake" should we "stop"? "*The children*!"

What would be the best time to do so?

"*Now*!" •

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Pocahontas exposed.

DISHONEST INJUN

By Michael Lind

For months I've been looking forward to the upcoming release of Walt Disney's animated musical *Pocahontas*. The idea of a heartwarming family musical based on the early history of English colonization in Virginia is nothing short of amazing. It is as though the Muppets or the Ice Capades were to do a version of *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*.

Think about it. From 1607, when the *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed* and *Discovery* sailed up the James River, until 1646, the English colonists were in an almost constant state of war with the Algonquin federation called the Powhatans after the father of Pocahontas. To be sure, there were cease-fires—one when Pocahontas, taken hostage by the English, was ransomed for some corn, and another when the "Indian princess," by then baptized and taught English, married an English widower, John Rolfe. (A few years later she died in England during a celebrity tour.) For the most part, though, the tale of early Virginia is a nauseating chronicle of atrocities and reprisals by both sides.

On the one side was Powhatan, a sort of Algonquin Genghis Khan, who had earlier annihilated his Chesapeake Indian rivals. At one point he tried to starve the colonists by cutting off the corn supply he had been providing. His subjects murdered English traders. After his death, his brother Opecancanough tried to exterminate the English altogether. In one attack he led on March 22, 1622, a third of the colonists were shot or hacked to death and Rolfe, his widowed nephew by marriage, may also have been killed.

On the other side, typical English methods for dealing with the Indians of Virginia have been described by Arthur Quinn in his recent history, *A New World*: "When one (raiding party) returned after a particularly successful massacre, they were admonished for having brought back alive the chief's wife and two children. To remedy the situation, the children were thrown into the river and their brains shot out; as for the mother, the president insisted they should burn her, for strangling on a gallows was too good." (Betcha don't see that in the Disney flick.) Some time later, the English lured 200 Pamunkey Indians to peace talks and murdered them with poisoned wine, then killed and scalped another fifty. The Virginia Company in London thought the poisoned wine was a bit excessive.

In later generations, white Americans chose to forget everything about Anglo-Virginia's drive for *Lebensraum* except for the romantic episode of Captain John Smith's rescue by Pocahontas (no second-graders dressing up for Pamunkey Poison Parties). The nineteenth-century American stage, as Robert S. Tilton relates in his *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative*, groaned and creaked beneath Pocahontas dramas and parodies.

In 1867, Henry Adams tried to debunk Smith's account of his rescue by Pocahontas; his essay had been written in 1862, as a "flank attack" on the South: the "Virginia aristocracy ... will be utterly graveled by it." The American hero who had been second only to Washington came to be regarded as a sort of Baron Munchausen, the role he plays in John Barth's novel *Sot-Weed Factor*.

But recent scholarship has shown that Smith's autobiographical accounts of Eastern European warfare are convincingly accurate. And J.A. Lemay, in *Did Pocahontas Save Captain John Smith?* (1992), refutes Adams, arguing that Smith's rescue by Pocahontas took place more or less as he described it. The trend toward a more objective appraisal of Smith can be seen in Arthur Quinn's portrayal of the captain as "a perfect specimen of lusty Elizabethan exuberance" whose "chief assets were his daring, his cunning, and his luck." The advance publicity from the Disney film shows a clean-shaven blond John Smith, with the voice of Mel Gibson. Smith looks more like a generic fairy-tale leading man than the bearded Renaissance soldier who, by his mid-20s, had been a pirate, a beggar in Ireland and a mercenary in the service of the kingdom of Hungary, which gave him a pension and a shield portraying three heads to commemorate Smith's beheading of three Turks.

Unlike the tale of Smith's rescue, the story of Pocahontas's later marriage to John Rolfe never became popular during the centuries in which interracial marriage was not only the greatest taboo in the United States but illegal in most parts of the country. In 1924, the Virginia Legislature revised the state's anti-miscegenation law, which dated from the 1600s, to exempt proud white descendants of Pocahontas (who included Woodrow Wilson's second wife, Edith Bolling Galt): "persons who have one-sixteenth or less of the blood of the American Indian and have no other non-Caucasian blood shall be deemed to be white persons." Needless to say, this definition would have excluded the Indian princess herself. Had she and Rolfe married in the Old Dominion in 1967, they would have committed a felony.

Besides marrying Pocahontas, Rolfe had another claim to fame. By experimenting with the cultivation of tobacco (West Indian, not local) to support his habit, he came up with the first of many American get-rich-quick schemes. First Jamestown, then Virginia and then much of the South were reorganized along West Indian lines. The result was a white-supremacist plantation society on the mainland based on the cultivation by exploited black labor of an addictive drug. Jesse Helms, then, is Powhatan's Revenge. •

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DO AS I SAY

By Andy Lamey

Few newspapers have disparaged affirmative action as passionately as *The Washington Times*, D.C.'s second-string daily with a strongly right-wing editorial tilt. Commenting, for example, on the recent Rutgers fracas over a racial gaffe by the school president, the *Times* editorialized that his problems "present a case study in the hypocrisy and the self-contradictions that entangle the proponents of quota politics and affirmative action." As with virtually every other conservative organ, the *Times*'s editorial hostility to what it calls "affirmative action (read: race-based quotas)" is as clear as it is relentless.

Maybe, then, someone should tell the personnel department. Even as the paper regularly excoriates affirmative action and quotas (the terms are interchangeable in the *Times*) it takes a more relaxed view closer to home. "We are not relenting in our efforts to reach out to minorities," says John Martin, the *Times*'s acting human resources director. "We attend job fairs that have concentrations of minorities, in the express hope of finding qualified minorities." Although Martin hires for the business side of the paper, he insists the editorial side "follow[s] the same practice.... From a very practical point of view, it improves the kind of sources we can have and the product we deliver." He sounds like Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

He's not alone. Increasingly, putatively conservative media outlets are introducing affirmative action and diversity efforts of their own. Take the *Orange County Register*, publishing in the seedbed of American conservatism. The paper editorialized this April that "Discrimination of any kind, including the reverse discrimination called affirmative action, should be stopped." Of any kind? "In some cases the ethnic background of a candidate can be a qualification," says *Register* Publisher David Threshie of his paper's hiring practices. "It is critically important to us that our newsroom reflect our readership," says newsroom editor Tonnie Katz.

Then there's the Heritage Foundation, one of Washington's best-known right-wing think tanks. In a July 1994 op-ed in *The Washington Times*, Neomi Rao, a Yale University student interning at Heritage, described in scathing terms her experience with multiculturalism on campus, blasting the "diversity bean counters" who "seek to undermine American culture" while defining herself, in contrast, as "a minority woman who claims an identity independent of race and gender." When she wrote this, Rao was working at Heritage under a Lawrence Wade Journalism Fellowship—a ten-week paid internship and $1,000 cash scholarship—for which minorities are given preferential treatment.

The more you look, the more you see the inroads affirmative action has made in the hiring practices of the conservative establishment. Of course, virtually all major papers and many other publications of varying ideologies have affirmative action programs; but for the organs disseminating anti-diversity rhetoric to be simultaneously courting minority reporters and editors in their own ranks is a bit inconsistent, to say the least.

In some cases, the conservative outlets' diversity programs could even be taken as models for their liberal counterparts to aspire to. Jane Ottley, who oversees *The Wall Street Journal*'s affirmative action program, says that the *Journal* eschews quotas and tries to ensure a proportional minority presence through recruiting efforts, a minority internship program and numerical goals. "Each of our hiring managers knows that he or she has got to make progress in this area," says Managing Editor Paul Steiger. "All of them are talked to about this at least once a year, and the ones that fall behind, or if they don't have any minorities working for them, or they don't have enough ... that leads to a discussion of how to do better." And it's not just on the reporting side of the paper, either; the notoriously conservative editorial page goes out of its way to attract minorities as well. "When you hire someone, you can't divorce their ethnic or geographic background from the package," says Editor Robert Bartley, who manages the hiring for the opinion page. "We keep looking for minority or, especially, black editorial writers." According to a 1995 American Society of Newspaper Editors survey, the *Journal*'s minority presence in the newsroom is 18 percent. At *The New York Times*, it's 13.7 percent.

Of course, conservative organs are alternately proud and extremely touchy about their race-based hiring practices. At *The Washington Times*, editors simply refuse to discuss it. "Have you talked to our P.R. department?" says Assistant Managing Editor Ted Agres before transferring the call as quickly as possible. Does Rupert Murdoch's tabloid *New York Post* have an affirmative action program? "They do," says Deputy Editor John Cassidy. Could he explain how it works? "No, I can't," he says, slamming down the phone.

Another option is to deny the facts. When asked about the race-conscious Wade Fellowship, Heritage Public Relations Director Cheryl Rubin protests that "it was never a scholarship for minority journalists." But when the fellowship was established in 1991, it was described by Heritage as being for minority journalists, and newspapers such as *The Orlando Sentinel* and *The Washington Times* reported it as such. A Heritage Foundation public relations counsel even sent a letter to THE NEW REPUBLIC (Correspondence, April 8, 1991) saying that "all of us at

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A view from Washington

HEY MR. PRESIDENT! DON'T PLAY POLITICS WITH AMERICAN JOBS.

When I came to work at Toyota's Georgetown plant seven years ago, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I knew nothing about the Japanese work ethic.

I thought it would be a good place to work for a while, then move on to something else.

But that's all changed.

I can't even imagine working somewhere else now. I've learned so much since I've been here. And it's more than just making cars--it's working together on a common goal.

But, unfortunately, I've learned some other things, too. I'm no expert on politics, but the way I see it, these 100 percent tariffs the Clinton Administration is pushing for on Japanese luxury cars are unfair.

What people don't realize is that these tariffs aren't hurting anyone more than Americans themselves. Right off the bat, nearly 8,000 workers from Toyota Lexus dealerships across the country may be out of a job if these things go through.

And that bothers me. And it should bother you, too. These are American businesses and American workers, a lot of them who used to sell other Toyota products like the Camry made in Georgetown.

I'm lucky. I'm not caught in the middle like the Lexus workers. But we consider Lexus and their employees as family. We're all part of the same team, and I feel for those guys.

And as far as the sanctions go, this may only be the beginning. What if they extend them to other products? If that's the case, then this will hit a lot closer to home.

And it won't just be the 6,100 workers at Georgetown. Toyota Motor Manufacturing, U.S.A., Inc. (TMM) is responsible for 20,000 jobs in Kentucky. So, if they start putting tariffs on other products, all of us--Kentuckians and the rest of the country--will suffer.

The U.S. government wants Japanese companies like Toyota to start buying more American parts. But Toyota is already doing more of this each year.

Due to Toyota's just-in-time delivery system, it's much better for us to have suppliers in the U.S.

I know it may soon be hard for U.S. companies to do business in Japan. But just how hard have they tried? The Big 3 say they want to sell their cars over there, but they don't really try. They keep sending over cars that are too big, and have developed only two American models that have right-hand drive.

You know, it's ironic that any of this stuff is happening anyway. Toyota believes in competition--it's good for everybody. That's why we have always opened up our plant to U.S. auto makers. Just about every car company in North America has toured our plant, including the CEO from Ford Motor Co.

The direct competition the Japanese have instilled here has helped the Big 3. They are all doing well; they use us as a benchmark for quality and training. In turn, we are always trying to improve because they are pushing us.

I just wish the two governments could sit down and solve this. It upsets me that we can't come to an agreement. It's scary because the U.S. seems to be bullying Japan, and it doesn't look like they are going to back down.

Like I said earlier, it's not only the Japanese that are going to get hurt by these sanctions--it is the Americans as well, especially if this turns into some kind of trade war.

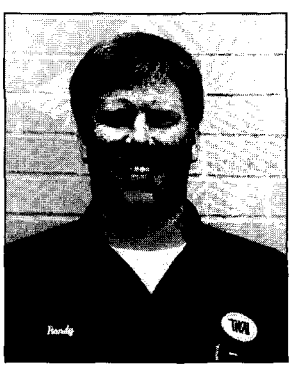
And, like I said before, I've learned more than how to make cars since I started here. I also learned that people have the wrong idea of just who works at our plant.

From the beginning, we've been made to feel like less than American because we are owned by a Japanese company. A lot of people believe that we are employing mainly Japanese workers.

But, what nobody talks about is how TMM actually only employs about 50 Japanese team members out of the 6,100 at the Georgetown plant. This is an American company, employing American workers.

From the very beginning--and I've been here from the start--we've been told, "You earn what you get." A lot is expected of you here but you are rewarded accordingly: "An honest day's pay for an honest day's work."

It's funny, but those kind of sayings are what I heard while growing up. They are American sayings, the same ones I'll teach my three children. And that's just my point: this is an American plant. TMM is an American company, and the thousands of people who work for Lexus in the United States are Americans as well.



Randy Sinkhorn, 38, lives in Georgetown, Ky. He is employed by Toyota Motor Manufacturing, U.S.A., Inc. as a production group leader in the Body Weld department. He was one of the first production workers hired at the TMM plant.

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Heritage are proud to support with voluntary contributed dollars a scholarship ... for minority student journalists." After the letter is pointed out to her, Rubin says it is incorrect. How so? She reads quickly from the fellowship's eligibility guidelines: "Candidates will be considered without regard to race, religion or ethnic origin, though preference will be given to African American, blah, blah, blah. So you get the point." Filling in the blah, blah, blahs, the sentence reads: "Candidates will be considered without regard to race, religion or ethnic origin, though preference will be given to African-, Hispanic-, Asian- and Native-American candidates."

Editors at *The Wall Street Journal*, to their credit, are up front about the role race plays in their hiring decisions. Even their editorial page rhetoric seems to be taking the new realities into account. Take a recent editorial about a student who sued San Fernando Valley College in California for ejecting her from a blacks-only class. While the *Journal* objected to affirmative action's excesses, the editors concluded that "most employers and most universities are going to continue to seek out minorities—not only is it good business practice, most Americans demand it."

Members of the press, particularly those at newspapers, are no strangers to this demand. Have there been any internal objections to the *Journal*'s editorial page race-conscious hiring? "There hasn't been any big argument about that," says Bartley. According to John Martin of *The Washington Times*, the same goes there. So now that diversity efforts have begun to make their way into the organs of the mainstream conservative press, it will be interesting to see how many of them will endorse an editorial position on color-blindness that is consistent with their own hiring practices. "That's one of the problems with the debate over affirmative action," says *Register* publisher Threshie. "It's oversimplified." •

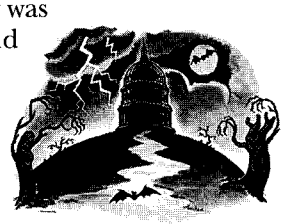
ON THE HILL

SMALL HARVEST

By Weston Kosova

If there is one thing Charles Schumer has learned, it's that there's no such thing as a farm cut. For years, the New York Democrat has been floating bills in the House calling for hefty reductions in the more than $10 billion the government doles out annually for agricultural subsidies, crop price supports and farm export payments. In the past, Schumer teamed up with the leading Republican farm-basher in the House, Dick Armey of Texas. Together, they tried to snuff out subsidies for farmers who make more than $100,000 a year, slash supports for sugar and peanuts that keep prices artificially high and gut the Market Promotion Program, which uses federal dollars to flack products such as ice cream and breakfast cereal abroad. "Look. If we're going to be cutting back on spending programs to the cities, there's no reason we shouldn't also look hard at what we're spending money for on farms," Schumer says. "The fact is, there's plenty of money wasted there, too." Invariably, *The New York Times* editorial page swoons over their proposals. Invariably, congressional colleagues from Kansas and Iowa do not. None of the Armey-Schumer farm-busters has made it off the House floor.

This year was going to be different. For one brief moment this spring, it looked as if House Budget Chairman John Kasich would take the same glee in dicing farm spending as he does everything else. He apparently had the green light from Speaker Newt Gingrich to go after farmers. What's more, Armey was now majority leader. Kasich could hardly resist draining the $50 billion trough.



You'd think so, anyway. Instead, Kasich's massive Republican budget resolution calls for around $9 billion in suggested farm cuts over five years—a meager 18 percent snip. Even those reductions wouldn't take effect until 1998. In fiscal years '96 and '97, the GOP spares farm programs altogether.

They might be spared even longer. Originally, Kasich's plan called for nearly $12 billion in farm cuts over five years. But when Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts got hold of Kasich's numbers, he threw a fit. Roberts's district is in the heart of Kansas wheat-'n'-cattle country. He vowed to take Kasich's numbers and crush them "into single digits."

Roberts took his case to Gingrich. But he didn't go alone. He had powerful allies: the Aggies, House Republicans from farming districts, who make up a sizable chunk of Gingrich loyalists. Thirty-four of the Republican House freshmen are from rural districts. They demanded Gingrich reconsider the farm numbers.

Gingrich caved. He and Kasich wrote Roberts a letter promising the chairman that he had nothing to worry about. The figures, the speaker reassured him, were subject to change. Armey, meanwhile, is keeping mum. House aides say he favored farm cuts much larger than the ones Kasich produced. And he certainly opposes Roberts's efforts to foil even mild reductions. But, as one Democratic Agriculture Committee staffer put it, "Armey's place is behind Newt, not in front of Roberts."

The chances for a major farm bill overhaul aren't much better in the Senate. Bob Dole certainly won't be leading the charge. The majority leader matches Roberts, his fellow Kansan, in his coddling of farm payments—even more so now that he's a presidential candidate. Instead, it's Richard Lugar, Agriculture Commit-

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tee chairman and Dole's rival for the White House, who's taking on the issue as a visibility booster. The senator has issued a list of fifty-three questions he thinks need to be asked about farm spending. Why should taxpayers subsidize farmers and not small business? Why should some crops be subsidized and others not? On the stump, Lugar warns that slashing farm subsidies is a critical test of congressional leadership. "I am not certain whether Congress is serious about cutting federal spending," he testified to the Senate Budget Committee. "But if we are serious, it is imperative that we act now."

For Lugar, running against farm subsidies is his way of showing he's got steel—a farm-state senator willing to stand up to the folks back home on the one issue they hold most dear. Trouble is, he doesn't pass his own test. Lugar wants to reduce price supports for heavily subsidized crops such as wheat, corn and cotton by 3 percent each year for five years, for a savings of $11.5 billion, and pick up an extra $3.5 billion by eliminating subsidies on exported crops. Grand savings: $15 billion, or just 30 percent. Not much of a hit, considering that in 1995 alone, the government will pay out more than $6 billion to farmers of the top seven subsidized crops. Given Lugar's supposedly grave doubts about whether we should be spending billions on farm subsidies at all, his pruning is pretty timid stuff.

There is a chance that the farm debate isn't completely done for. Back in the House, Schumer is getting ready to mount his biggest assault ever against subsidies. This time, he's paired up with Republican Dick Zimmer of New Jersey, who's standing in for Armey. Schumer tried the majority leader before he recruited Zimmer, but Armey turned him down. "He said his leadership responsibilities don't allow him to play such a major role," Schumer says.

On June 14, Zimmer and Schumer plan to introduce a bill that will likely call for the dismantling of many farm subsidy programs. They're not giving out all the details yet, but Schumer says at least three things are for certain. The bill will revive Schumer's pet project to end support payments to farmers who earn more than $100,000 a year; it will axe the $100 million a year Market Promotion Program; and it will nix payments for sugar, honey and peanuts. Sources close to Schumer say the bill may also eliminate subsidies on wheat, corn, oats, sorghum, barley, rice and cotton over five years. Now that's a farm bill.

Schumer's intention is to beat Republicans at their own rhetoric. "Agriculture is the linchpin of their whole cutting program," he says. "If they aren't willing to cut something that goes against their interest, it won't bode well for their claims that this is a revolution." But Republicans aren't his only antagonists. Minority Leader Richard Gephardt is decidedly cold on the bill, and potential Democratic co-sponsors are pressing him to soften cuts that affect their districts. Schumer's efforts won't go entirely unheralded, though. Come next Thursday, at least he can look forward to a friendly little write-up in the *Times*. •

California vs. affirmative action.

LOSING RACE

By John J. Miller and Abigail Thernstrom

Silenced by throat surgery, California Governor Pete Wilson still knows how to make himself heard. Last week he issued an executive order to end affirmative action preferences for state employees. "We must make hard work, self-reliance, individual initiative and merit—not group membership—the basis for success in America," he declared in an "open letter" to the public. "Mandating and practicing inequality [cannot] bring equality."

The executive order sounds more sweeping than it really is. It won't rescind minority set-asides and other programs established by federal or state law. Nor will it directly alter race-based admissions and hiring policies in higher education. It will change how the state hires and promotes workers, and it abolishes 118 affirmative action advisory panels. Most important, it's an unequivocal, no-going-back endorsement of the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI).

That initiative, for all the hype, is desperately in need of a jump-start. For a short while, it was hot. Press calls came from Washington and around the world. But, after about three months, interest faded. Though the public may think its passage is a sure thing, its authors have yet even to file with the state attorney general's office, a

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move they must make before collecting the roughly 700,000 valid signatures needed to qualify for the ballot in November 1996. "It became so famous, everyone thought it was taken care of," said the measure's campaign chairman, Larry Arnn, who heads the Claremont Institute. "But fund-raising has gone a lot slower than I thought it would."

Arnn said that the civil rights initiative will have to raise about $1 million by this fall, when organizers should start their petition drive. So far, a bit more than $200,000 has trickled in, barely enough to begin building a minimal political infrastructure to coordinate thousands of petition gatherers and ignite grass-roots activism. In fact, all along, the initiative's backers have been but a handful of committed troopers.

One problem is that it's a competitive fund-raising year for conservatives everywhere. The GOP presidential campaign has started early, and Californian conservatives, in particular, have lots of choices for where to mail their checks. Wilson is tapping all his donors, and the 1996 Republican convention in San Diego needs a down payment. Besides the affirmative action measure, an initiative on school choice, three different versions of tort reform and a measure that would block liberal Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis from succeeding Wilson all seek to land on the ballot next year.

To make matters worse, two copycat initiatives already have been filed with the attorney general. Both look like reckless attempts to cash in on the affirmative action initiative's high visibility, making the fund-raising chore even tougher. One of them expands upon CCRI's language—which closely imitates the 1964 Civil Rights Act—to include homosexuals. The last thing CCRI needs is a false linkage to the anti-gay initiatives that appeared in recent years in Colorado and Oregon.

Other problems have also emerged. The California branch of the Associated General Contractors, which has opposed preferences vigorously in the past, declined to endorse this particular measure, despite lots of lobbying. In May, the L.A. County Bar Association's board of trustees voted 21-0 to oppose the initiative. Some of the state's most famous academic conservatives—most notably John H. Bunzel and James Q. Wilson—are also keeping their distance. When the state assembly held hearings on affirmative action in May, it had to import most of its star witnesses: Clint Bolick of the Institute for Justice and Linda Chavez of the Center for Equal Opportunity from Washington, D.C., and University of Texas law professor Lino Graglia from Austin. Even the initiative's founding core has grown weary. "I want nothing more than to go back to teaching anthropology," said Glynn Custred, co-author of the initiative and a professor at Cal State-Hayward. Charles Geshekter, a history professor at Cal State-Chico, adds, "It's no fun being a critic of race bias and gender preferences. Lots of colleagues tell me privately, 'You're doing a great job,' but they don't have the guts to stand up for themselves. So we're out there alone, shunned on campus."

On the national level, hardly anybody is standing up for CCRI either. Repeated requests for help to presidential wanna-bes Bob Dole and Phil Gramm and presidential maybe Newt Gingrich have gone unanswered, though chairman Arnn says that Gramm offered a "verbal" commitment last year. Lamar Alexander sent a letter of support in March. Only Wilson has moved beyond rhetoric. He'll soon sign his name to a direct-mail letter for the measure. The closest Gramm has come to action is a promise to strike down preferences on his Inauguration Day, if elected—but he hasn't talked much about his pledge since then. Dole has said he will introduce civil rights legislation later this year, but few people are holding their breath for floor action.

Wilson, a bland politician with a knack for tying himself to winning issues, has only recently rejected affirmative action. He supported preferences as mayor of San Diego and as U.S. senator. Before his re-election last year, he signed into law a bill that treats Portuguese-Americans as a disadvantaged minority. In October, he told the *San Jose Mercury News*, "I have long supported set-asides." Still, for whatever reason, he has become the first governor to begin dismantling affirmative action. Conservative darlings such as Carroll A. Campbell Jr. of South Carolina, John Engler of Michigan and Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin never managed it.

Perhaps they just exemplify old-fashioned Republican ambivalence. The GOP has never fought hard against preferences. Indeed, the demand that federal contractors set goals for minority hiring was an innovation largely of Richard Nixon's. More recently, the Republican National Committee was happy to help black Democrats gerrymander congressional districts by race throughout the South, in order to boost the number of white Republican districts. Affirmative action hearings in the House of Representatives this spring are best characterized by Republican indifference and Democratic intensity. Gingrich press secretary Tony Blankley says a full-scale challenge is "not imminent." Senate GOP leaders say the same. Dole assigned the issue to Republican senators Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas and Kit Bond of Missouri—no storm troopers—and, as yet, there's no timetable for action. Wilson, for his part, rescinded not only executive orders issued by former Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, but also those of Republicans Ronald Reagan and George Deukmejian. What's more, a recent survey of CEOs conducted by Organization Resources Counselors Inc., a business group, found strong support for affirmative action, which suggests that corporate donors want a soft line on preferences. Some companies—Bechtel and Levi-Strauss, for instance—may even throw money at anti-initiative efforts.

That could make passing the initiative tougher than most people think, even though California polls show big majorities already in support and few people undecided. Nationwide, three out of four Americans say they oppose policies that give preferences to minorities "to make up for past discrimination," according to a recent

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Washington Post/ABC News poll. But only 28 percent want to "do away ... entirely" with affirmative action programs. In other words, they want something "fair" but not "mean." This ambivalence gives opponents of the measure an opening, which they are already trying to exploit. Jesse Jackson has called Wilson a "refined, unprincipled George Wallace." The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund said the governor wants to take California "back to an era where women and minorities 'knew their place.'" Such rhetoric didn't stop Prop 187; this time, however, it just might work, as it often has before.

Arnn says he wants to raise between $3 and $7 million for the general campaign. That would permit a relatively generous advertising budget and probably ensure victory. It also would allow the initiative's backers to fund helpful research. The Pacific Research Institute was expected to release a study this week that shows University of California medical schools admitting minority applicants at two to four times the rate of Asians and whites. At U.C.-Davis, from 1987 to 1993, affirmative action students (a group that does not include Asians) made up 13 percent of the applicant pool and 32 percent of those accepted. "The chance of that happening without racial preferences is less than one in a million," said the Pacific Research Institute's number-cruncher Michael Lynch. The problem for the initiative right now is that nobody wants to underwrite this kind of research; Pacific paid for its study out of general operating expenses, not with a specific grant.

Backers of the civil rights initiative almost saved themselves a bundle last March. Campaign strategist Arnie Steinberg came close to cutting a deal with California Democrats, many of whom are scared to death of seeing the measure on the November ballot next year. Use your authority to vote it onto the ballot in March 1996 instead, said Steinberg; it will save us the trouble of a petition drive and shield Democratic candidates from an anti-preference backlash in the general election. Conceivably, Democrats might have jumped at such an offer, which would have given them a breather and would have been justifiable. But they balked. Longtime State Assembly Speaker Willie Brown weighed in against the option. The California Civil Rights Initiative relies on the "pure, unadulterated exploitation of racism," Brown said. Almost single-handedly, he kept it off the March ballot by strong-arming fellow Democrats in the California Senate. He angered many of them in the process. "It won't do anything but cost the Democrats votes," said Bill Wardlaw, President Clinton's California campaign chair in 1992. "I just hope it doesn't hurt Clinton."

It will, of course, though Brown seems not to care. Early in June, he announced his candidacy in this November's San Francisco mayoral election (and he just engineered his retirement as speaker by hand-picking his Republican successor). The liberal Bay Area is the only part of the state that rejected Prop 187 last year, and a *San Francisco Chronicle* poll in May showed only 50 percent of its residents supporting the initiative—a low figure in a state that backs it overwhelmingly. Even if everything falls into place for CCRI, San Francisco pols may be smart to run against it.

Other Democrats remain jittery. "CCRI exacerbates a gap in the party between the wealthier, older white voters whom we need to win and the have-nots who benefit from Democratic policies but don't vote," said Democratic strategist Darry Sragow. Only one important Democrat in the state has endorsed the initiative: Duane Garrett, who headed Senator Dianne Feinstein's last five campaigns. That connection, however, has sparked dozens of rumors about an eventual endorsement from Feinstein herself, which she has done nothing to dispel. Representatives Howard Berman, Gary Condit and Jane Harman may also climb aboard, according to several Democratic political consultants, especially if Feinstein leads the way. Berman and Harman will want to appeal to Jewish voters; Condit may endorse because he's a moderate who often bolts the party. "This will ultimately carry the liberal Jewish vote, the Asian vote and probably Hispanics in the 40 percent range," said Wardlaw.

But, even if the initiative qualifies for the ballot, money problems could wreck these grand bipartisan, multiracial plans. "The worst-case scenario for us is that we have to take a pile of Republican soft money at the last minute to save CCRI," said Steinberg. "That politicizes the whole thing in a way I've really tried to avoid." Garrett agrees. "If the GOP finances this, then they frame it as a partisan issue. That makes it harder for Democrats to come out in favor of it," he said.

The initiative still has plenty of advantages. There's probably no better place than California to grow a movement aimed at rolling back racial and ethnic preferences. In higher education, the double standards for admissions and faculty hiring have been widely known for a long time. (Whites and Asians admitted to Berkeley as freshmen in 1994 had, on average, SAT scores well over 200 points higher than those of blacks and Hispanics.) In 1991 the California legislature went so far as to pass a bill, vetoed by Wilson, that mandated proportionate ethnic and racial graduation rates from the state's colleges. Public employment and contracting are also rife with preferences.

Moreover, the large number of Hispanics and Asians, especially in California, has complicated the politics of affirmative action. In L.A. County, Latinos see blacks as overrepresented in public employment and have brought suit to get their "fair share." From Berkeley to Koreatown, Asians see a system rigged against them.

On the other hand, fatigue, a shortage of funds, competition for the airwaves, a measure of uncertainty among supporters, the opposition of big business, fence-sitting on the part of the national Republican leadership and queasiness among some Democrats may all come together in the end to defeat the measure. The California Civil Rights Initiative still has a long way to go. •

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The feminist case against First Ladies.

ABOLISH HER

By Germaine Greer

Though feminism is often said to have changed the world, it is still true at the end of the millennium that the surest strategy for a woman who is seriously interested in executive political power is to marry a man who either is or is going to be the president of the United States. Failing that, she might set her cap at an upward-thrusting young politician in any of the increasing number of administrations that choose to imitate the American way. Now that the United States is the only superpower, the influence of American culture is growing rather than diminishing. Because the United States controls the information industry, people all over the world have capitulated to the notions of beauty and power that American news media disseminate. Though no one has preached or proselytized on their behalf, brassieres, high-heeled shoes, lipstick, nail varnish, hair lacquer and bleach have conquered the world, following the trail blazed by Coca-Cola. Notions of female attractiveness become ever more uniform while for men the world over power-dressing means the dark suit. The First Lady is the archetypal lipstick-skirt-high-heels beside the archetypal suit. She is the heroine of the most glamorous of the soap operas, watched and admired by prostitutes and peasant laborers in every hovel on the planet.

At the close of a recent conference of the British Labor Party, Tony Blair, the man seen as the prime minister in waiting, and his deputy, John Prescott, brought their respective wives on to the podium and placed them centrally behind the lectern for the smiling, waving picture that was the only image of the proceedings to be published in the media. What the image of the elevated wives promised was not only a First Lady or two, but presidential-style leadership with its attendant cult of personality in lieu of ideology. The elevation of a democratically elected leader's unelected consort makes a mockery of the democratic process itself but, as long as the media are the real arbiters of leader selection, neither politician nor party will dare to buck the trend. Before it can be bucked, the trend should be heftily and universally deplored, in the name of both equality and democratic accountability, so that the media appetite for information about the leader's bedmate sickens and finally dies. What follows is a case for liberating First Ladies from decorative servitude, so that they may go about their own legitimate business.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, the only domestic relationship of importance is the relationship between sexual partners. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, even parents and children are all expendable, if their claims conflict with the intensity of the attachment of sexual partners. In drifting away from both their families and freezing off even the children they had had together, Nancy and Ronald Reagan were the epitome of First Coupledom. In the world that is still organized on principles of familiality, on the other hand, where mothers take precedence over wives, and children over husbands, there are no First Ladies. What we are more likely to encounter in such traditional societies is an actual female head of state rather than a male head of state accompanied on state occasions by a First Lady. Indira Gandhi was, as Benazir Bhutto is, the *daughter* of a head of state. The foregrounding of the female consort of a living head of state is a subtle indicator of how fast and to what degree the country in question is becoming Americanized.

Generally speaking, the Orient has held out against this kind of Americanization. The wives of Japanese and Korean prime ministers are not public figures to be paraded, well-coiffed and groomed, before the media. This is one reason Westerners find their names and faces hard to remember. We recall Anwar Sadat with vividness because we were familiar with the image of his beautiful wife. The president of the Philippines we can most readily name is Ferdinand Marcos, mostly because of Imelda. Likewise, the president of Argentina whom everyone can name is Juan Perón, because of Evita. The image of a desirable, adoring wife reflects glamour back upon the president; her attractiveness increases his media visibility.

The country that pioneered democracy also invented its contradiction in the figure of the unelected First Lady. The phenomenon was created by the American newspapers that reported the first public appearances of George Washington's almost-60-year-old wife, Martha, in 1789. It was probably inevitable that the populace would

GERMAINE GREER is currently finishing a book on women and medicine, to be published by Knopf. An earlier version of this essay appeared in *The Guardian*.

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simply transfer to her the behavior they would have felt appropriate for a queen consort and greet her with thirteen-gun salutes and rousing cheers of "God Bless Lady Washington." The newspapers may have begun by simply reporting the sensation she created and the extravagance of the pomp and circumstance that local administrations were prepared to stage as a testimony of their loyalty to her husband, but the romance of the president's wife soon gathered its own momentum.

Because few women appeared in print, the fuss made over Martha Washington by American newspapers catapulted her to a position of enormous influence. People began to care what she thought about things, but the contradiction that has tormented all First Ladies already afflicted her. The more people cared what she thought, the more careful she had to be about keeping her thoughts to herself and saying nothing that might complicate her husband's affairs. Then, as now, the president's wife was expected to play the role of virtuoso housekeeper, to run the residence and to entertain visiting dignitaries. Martha was present at the inauguration ceremony for Washington's second term of office, establishing a precedent that endures to this day. History does not record whether Washington kissed his wife after he took the oath, as is now the practice.

When the widower Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, the tradition was already so entrenched that he was obliged to invite Dolley Madison to serve as First Lady, which involved her living in the official residence and taking breakfast and dinner with the president; when her husband was elected in his turn, and she continued to play the role of "presidentress" and queen of hearts, she was simply the most powerful woman in America. By the time Elizabeth Monroe found herself a president's wife, a distinction between the role of First Lady and queen consort had come to be made. A queen was supposed to be standoffish and withdrawn, to insist upon her privacy and to dress in a fashion more formal and costly than attractive. The First Lady, on the other hand, had to grant interviews to reporters, to entertain lavishly but relatively informally, to plant trees and visit schools and help her husband's political career. Her duty was to maintain a high profile without threatening to eclipse or overwhelm her husband. When Jackie Kennedy was called "the queen" it was meant as a criticism. When Nancy Reagan miscalculated her role as a guest at the wedding of the Prince of Wales and attempted to maintain a more conspicuous presence than the royal family itself, she was ridiculed in caricatures showing her as "Queen Nancy" with crown and scepter.

On all official occasions the First Lady is expected to let herself be seen beside her husband, so that she can lead the appreciation of the audience for his every word and action. Though she may not be expected to glitter from head to foot, as the queen consort was expected to do, she should look good. If she is seen to be frumpish, fat or old, the implication damages her husband. The queens consort of the past had to reassure people about the likelihood of an heir and an uncontested succession. Since the office of the head of state is not hereditary, this symbolic function is no longer required. The modern First Lady performs a subtler function, though hardly more democratic. Nowadays she reassures us as to the head of state's active heterosexuality. The president and his family are required to demonstrate not only the fast-disappearing values of monogamy and family unity, but also potency, even potency beyond the normal or the usual. Great interest was expressed from the first in the question of whether a First Lady, regardless of age or state of health, actually shared the First Gentleman's bed. Many an arriving First Lady announced that she, unlike older or less attractive incumbents, would certainly and invariably take her nightly repose alongside the president.

The politician's wife is expected to know the score, to accept her responsibilities, to endure cuckoldom and to stand by her man. She must not complain of the neglect that is virtually certain to be her lot in a country where legislatures sit for sessions all around the clock. Yet she must be seen to be faithful to her absentee husband, to have borne children by him, the more the better, and to be devoted to those children. Any indication that her husband and family are not in themselves sufficient to absorb all her energies is disadvantageous to her husband's prospects. The unexamined feeling behind the symbolism is that the politician who will take the top job is not of the same dimensions as other men but in a measure superhuman, a whirlwind or powerhouse of a man who exacts unthinking adoration from all who have direct dealings with him, including and above all his wife. Under no circumstances can the First Lady permit herself to scowl or snap at her husband in public, to straighten his tie or brush his shoulders. Conversely, he must not show himself to be too aware of her presence. He may place a hand on her waist or shoulder, but, though her eyes must be turned to him, his eyes must be turned to his public. The gesture he should make should be one not of attachment but of ownership and control. She may turn to the public but only after she has followed the line of his eyes; she cannot seek public acclaim for herself.

Kennedy is supposed to have told his wife to keep smiling and, if she had to talk, to talk about her children. Betty Ford asked why she should not have her own ideas and announced her support for the Equal Rights Amendment and the legality of abortion, though her husband opposed both. She was declared the most popular woman in America; women wore badges saying "BETTY FORD'S HUSBAND FOR PRESIDENT." But in the end this did neither her nor her husband any good. In 1978 she was obliged to go public with the confession that she was addicted to alcohol and painkillers.

At the time of Betty Ford's emergence, an attack of feminist triumphalism resulted in a comparison between her and Madame Chiang Kai-chek. In fact, Soong Mei-ling was a political figure in her own right. Though she

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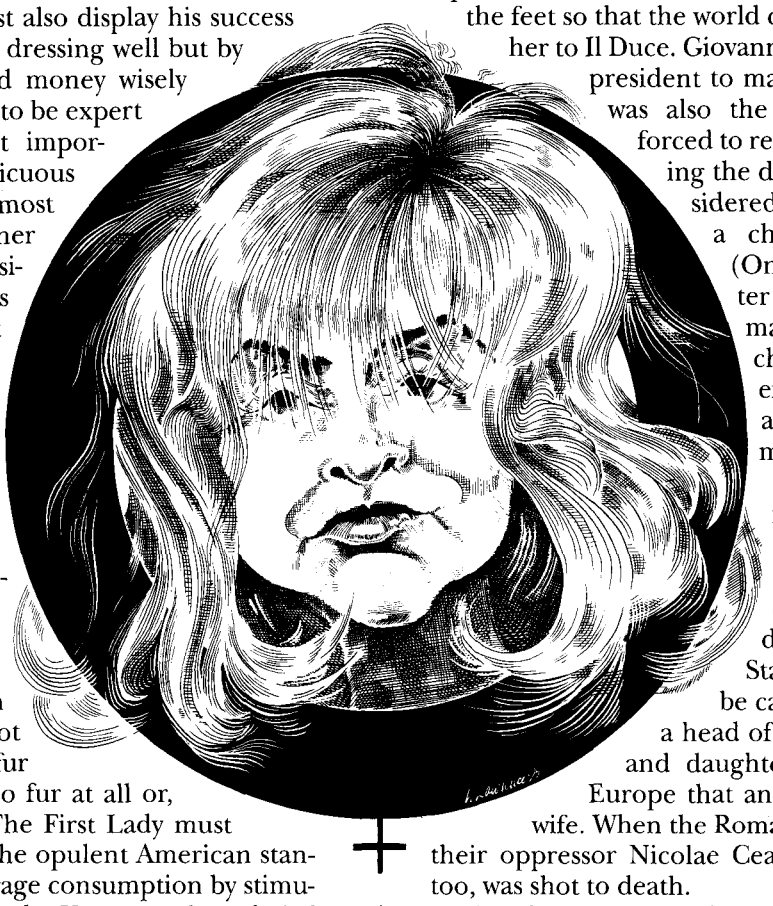
and her sister both married political leaders, these men were leaders who needed them to become politically effective. Soong Mei-ling was educated in the United States; she created and maintained the relationship between nationalist China and the United States. For more than ten years, she was named the most admired woman in the world. She created a unique hybrid of Asian and Western woman, being both a hard-working and ambitious member of a political dynasty and a First Lady in the American style. There is no sense in which the mild outspokenness of Betty Ford can be said to have eclipsed the power and prestige of Madame Chiang Kai-chek.

Besides confirming the First Gentleman's sexual adequacy, the First Lady must also display his success as a provider not only by dressing well but by being prepared to spend money wisely and well, showing herself to be expert in the housewife's most important role, that of conspicuous consumer. This is the most problematic aspect of her contradictory responsibilities. Good taste is expensive, but the First Lady should not be seen squandering money, especially in times of hardship. Nor, however, should she accept the kind of cut-price offers that could be interpreted as bribes. Mamie Eisenhower was severely criticized for paying $585 for a fur coat worth $1,800. There would have been even sharper criticism, not least from the American fur trade, if she had worn no fur at all or, worse still, a tacky fur. The First Lady must project a vivid image of the opulent American standard of living and encourage consumption by stimulating emulation of her style. Yet even when their husbands had great private fortunes, presidents' wives have been taken to task for spending too much. Virtually all First Ladies have come to grief in struggling with these contradictions, some repeatedly.



As a president's popularity slides and his power wanes, the public perception of the First Lady is also likely to change. Her influence upon her husband will be seen to be noxious. She will be blamed for steering him in the wrong direction, for subordinating his great office to her own mean desires to advance her favorites or her family. Then and only then will it be objected that, as she has not been elected, she should have no voice in policymaking. If the president is impeached, she will be impeached with him. Pat Nixon escaped the obloquy that fell on her husband partly because, over the months of the Watergate affair, she appeared to be more and more silent and withdrawn, an icon of suffering, blond wifehood alongside his dark, evil genius. Hillary Clinton, by contrast, is seen to be largely her husband's fault; the suggestion has been made that he should sacrifice her for his presidency, but it is a suggestion he could not follow, even if he wanted to. Disastrously for Clinton, the impression that his wife has power over him is now so deep as to be ineradicable.

In Europe, the keeping of a decorative consort has been associated more with dictatorship than democracy. Everybody knows about Eva Braun, but nowadays the wives of German leaders are private people. Mussolini had, besides a faithful wife, a spectacular mistress who was put to death with him and whose corpse was hung by the feet so that the world could see what endeared her to Il Duce. Giovanni Leone, the only Italian president to make a display of his wife, was also the only Italian president forced to resign. In Europe, presenting the domestic as public is considered a kind of prostitution, a cheapening of intimacy. (Once elected prime minister of Italy, even TV megamagnate Silvio Berlusconi chose not to expose his extremely decorative wife, actress Veronica Lario, to media attention.)

More important, there is considerable resistance in Europe to the idea of conferring power upon unelected individuals. In the United States, great anxiety would be caused by the spectacle of a head of state grooming his sons and daughters to succeed him; in Europe that anxiety is extended to the wife. When the Romanians rose up and killed their oppressor Nicolae Ceauşescu, his wife, Elena, too, was shot to death.

What the Romanians feared was the resuscitation of the tyrant in the person of his wife, who was treated in many ways as an American First Lady is treated. Even though a First Lady has no mandate from the people and is unlikely even to seek one in his lifetime, she may herself become a head of state if her husband dies. The world's first woman prime minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, succeeded her husband as head of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party when he was assassinated. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's widow could have been elected to succeed him, but resigned the right to her daughter, Benazir, who had been groomed for the part. The wife of General Ziaur Rahman lived in virtual purdah but after his assassination succeeded him as head of the Bangladeshi National Party and prime minister of Bangladesh. Corazon Aquino was elected president of the Philippines because her husband was murdered before he could run

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against Marcos. To the Western mind this seems to mistake the shadow for the substance. And the American system is devised so that there can never be a vacuum in power after an assassination because the vice president will take over until an election can be called. So far, no American wife has campaigned as the survivor of First Coupledom, and it seems less and less likely that such a thing could ever happen, partly because of the contradictory emphases, first on the woman's prime responsibility being to look after her husband's needs, and, second, on her (largely illusory) independence of mind.

Even in Britain, which has always enjoyed a special relationship with the United States, there has been entrenched resistance to the creation of the role of First Lady. This is partly because the royal family draws off a good deal of the prurient interest that demands the exposure of the leading politician's family. But there seems to be a further explanation in the failure of any British politician's wife to catch the popular imagination. The British were led by the bachelor Edward Heath as recently as the 1970s. (No bachelor has been elected president of the United States in 100 years.) Heath's successors' wives have been fairly inconspicuous. As for Denis Thatcher, though he trudged obediently behind his wife whenever she required his presence, he was not obliged to play any version of the First Lady's role. Whenever there was a spotlight, the great lady stood in it alone.

Even in England, however, just as there has been a gradual but intensifying trend toward presidential politics, with increasing emphasis on selling the prime ministerial candidate rather than his party and its policies, there is a new emphasis on political spouses. A distinct attempt was made to groom Norma Major for greater visibility at her husband's side. She was specially made over to appear on the cover of a glossy magazine and was shown inside posing, rather unconvincingly, in various glamorous outfits.

As pressure builds to oust the monarchy, there are other signs that the ideology of the First Lady is catching on. Princess Diana, for example, behaved more like a First Lady than a queen. Male politicians are beginning to make more use of their wives and to demand privileges for them. In November 1994 an opposition member of the British House of Commons begged to be informed of the sums paid by British taxpayers so that wives of senior officials of the Department of Trade and Industry could accompany them on official trips overseas. The question was asked, if the Trade and Industry Secretary really needed his wife by his side on an official visit to Australia, Japan and South Africa, could he not have paid her fare himself? The department replied that the ministers' wives were involved in official programs abroad but could not describe what they had actually done. We know what they had done: they had arrived with their husbands, had been greeted with their husbands and, when the serious business began, had been taken on a series of outings with the other wives to visit a children's hospital or a school or take in a concert perhaps. When it was time for hospitality, cocktail parties, banquets and balls, they reappeared at their husbands' sides, adding color and grace to the drab panoply of suits. By acting as First Ladies in training they were showing their husbands to be on the fast lane of the highway to power.

The extreme example of the luster that a wife can shed upon a presidential image is represented by Jacqueline Kennedy. Her husband being superman, it is inevitable that she, too, would come to be represented as something superhuman. When she died at the age of 64 she was mourned not as the widow of Aristotle Onassis nor as an independent businesswoman but as the widow of John Kennedy. His marital infidelities having become public knowledge, she took on ever more stature retrospectively: she had been almost regal in her refusal to seek redress for his betrayals. Kennedy, too, accumulated charisma posthumously because he kept Jackie at the same time that he enjoyed, and could have kept if he had wanted to, a stable of gorgeous concubines. The deployment of the First Lady is a fundamental part of creating the icon of the larger-than-life man, the president by divine selection. Kennedy was never obliged to become a lame-duck president or to return to the ranks of mere mortals. That he died in his wife's arms completed his apotheosis; he became an act that could not be followed. Camille Paglia likens the pink suit Mrs. Kennedy wore that day to the Shroud of Turin, apparently undisturbed by any realization that she is deifying not the woman who wore the suit but the man whose blood stained it.

In life, as distinct from myth, Jackie Kennedy was not a great success as a First Lady. Her lack of the common touch, her moodiness and solitariness and her exotic and intellectual tastes made her a political liability. In the early part of John Kennedy's career, she remained pregnant and out of sight; she played only a limited role in the presidential campaign. When he was elected she walked on the beach by herself and wept. It soon became her habit to spend more of her time in a rented house in the country than in the White House. She eventually came to enjoy her patronage and power, but she had not actually planned to play such a role and had little interest in the political realities that sustained it. Her potential as an attention getter was not realized until she took Paris by storm in 1961 and was named Woman of the Year.

The First Lady par excellence was Nancy Reagan, who seems to have entertained the ambition ever since 1930 when she appeared in a school play called *First Lady* by Dayton and Kaufman. Those who remember her as a young actress were impressed by her obvious ambition; when she met Reagan, then president of the Screen Actors' Guild, she knew that she wanted to be his wife. She married him on March 4, 1952, and bore a seven-pound daughter on October 21. Her new husband was first a Democrat, then a Democrat for Nixon and then a right-wing Republican, as his wife had always been. She persuaded him to run for governor of California in 1966

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Raising the Ceiling—and the Floor

One of the reasons American students don't do as well as they could is that we don't ask enough of them. Students—and sometimes parents—think teachers who assign lots of homework or expect hard work are "mean." And many people think that if we give students more demanding work, more of them will fail or drop out.

But one high school principal in New York state took the risk that raising the academic bar would also raise student achievement. And it turned out that he was right.

In New York, students must take Regents courses and fairly rigorous Regents examinations to receive a Regents diploma. Most (but not all) of the students in the Regents track are college-bound. Weaker students generally take less demanding non-Regents courses and easier competency tests to graduate.

The system we have now only challenges a small group of top students.

Six years ago, Fredric Cohen, principal of John F. Kennedy High School in Bellmore, faced faculty discontent over the non-Regents courses in his school. Cohen says that these classes consisted of two types of students—the "can't do's" who have trouble with the work, and the "won't do's" who don't put any effort into school work. Isolated in their non-Regents classes from the rest of the students, these were "angry, self-loathing youngsters who learn little and are viewed by teachers as hostile and uneducable." Cohen proposed a radical change: eliminate the non-Regents classes and integrate those students into Regents classes. The results have been impressive, and the two other high schools in the district have followed suit.

Fifteen percent more students in the Bellmore-Merrick district now take Regents exams. This means that about 120 more students per grade are taking more rigorous courses and more challenging tests—and meeting higher expectations. In English, 80 percent of students pass the Regents exam, compared with 61 percent four years ago. In Sequential Math I, 87 percent now pass the Regents exam, up from 71 percent. Cohen notes similar, but less dramatic, improvement in other subjects.

How do they make it work? Teachers are not told which students in their class would have been the non-Regents students. The faculty place a lot of emphasis on student effort, rewarding diligence and denying rewards to those who don't bother to try. Interns from a local university provide extra help to slower students. Teachers modify instruction to accommodate the "can't do" students' learning difficulties, and they have little trouble passing the Regents courses. The "won't do" students fail, Cohen says, not because they can't complete their assignments, but because they don't attempt them.

Some seniors must attend summer school to make up failed courses so they can graduate. If non-Regents courses were still available, these same students would have been able to graduate with their class—but only by taking lower-level classes, putting in minimal effort, and meeting only minimal standards. Extra effort is required for them to pass the Regents exam, but this shows they can achieve a solid level of proficiency in a subject, not just squeak by.

There have been some interesting side effects. Since the non-Regents students are no longer isolated from the rest of the student body, more students overall are involved, as Cohen puts it, "in the mainstream of student life," participating on teams and in other activities. The former non-Regents students are proud that they are taking classes and exams usually taken only by the smart kids. Vandalism is down.

Some of the top Regents students have developed higher aspirations, asking to move to advanced classes. Plans are under discussion to eliminate some advanced Regents classes to encourage the high-achievers to reach even higher by taking an Advanced Placement (AP) course instead. Already more youngsters are taking AP courses. The net effect has been to raise both the floor and the ceiling of achievement at Kennedy High.

Cohen readily admits the system isn't perfect. If too many "won't do" students end up in one class, they can cause problems and must be moved. And he's dissatisfied because they haven't yet figured out how to motivate the "won't do's." But so what if the system isn't perfect, if it's pushing more students—at all levels—to higher achievement?

If we continue to ask little of our students, we will continue to get what we ask for. Some people argue that raising academic standards and expectations is elitist. But which system is more elitist—one that expects high achievement of only a small group of students or one that expects it of most? The system we have now only challenges a small group of top students and consigns the rest to mediocrity because we think they can't do harder work. Bellmore's experience shows that this isn't true. Asking more of all students—and giving them the help they need to do harder work—will actually make our education system more equitable and less elitist.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1995 by Albert Shanker.

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and had cosmetic surgery on her eyes so that they would sparkle like those of a woman in love. Her size-4 figure was honed for the gowns that couturiers would be happy to let her have for half-price. When Ronnie was sworn in in the middle of the night it was because Nancy's astrologer had pronounced that time the most auspicious. As California's First Lady, she not only employed her own staff and arranged her own appearances in the national press but also ran her husband, who called her "Mommy." If Nancy Reagan had been built on a larger scale, her control over her husband would have been seen to be repugnant; being small and decorative and pippy-poo she got away with what White House aides sometimes characterized as murder.

It could have been written of Reagan, "It may be that all his human emotions were concentrated on her, and on getting and keeping power, of course. Even his children found him strangely distant and impersonal." In fact these words were originally written of Nicolae Ceauşescu, whose wife, Elena, like Nancy Reagan, was genuinely and totally absorbed in her husband and attentive to his every need. Like Nancy Reagan, Elena Ceauşescu was of humble birth. As an apparatchik she may have modeled herself on Madame Mao, but her notions of style and luxury were thoroughly Western. Her husband smoked American cigarettes and used American razor blades; large American-made television sets and videotape recorders were in every room of their many palaces. Because Romania was seen as a bridge between East and West they were caressed by Western governments; in 1978 the Ceauşescus made an official visit to Washington and later enjoyed the hospitality of the president of France and the Queen of England. Amid a shower of honors from Western governments, they were awarded honorary citizenship of Disneyland.

The Ceauşescus were not typical of Soviet-bloc First Couples. In 1959, when Pat Nixon accompanied her husband to the Soviet Union, there were no other women of similar status present at the public events she was obliged to attend until she asked that Russian wives be invited. Then Nina Kruschev was brushed down and wheeled on. Later the same year Mrs. Kruschev accompanied her husband to the United States where all who saw her were astonished at her dowdy, even shabby appearance. As a further induction into First Ladyhood Mamie Eisenhower presented her with a designer hat, which she did not dare to wear but took home for other Russian women to copy. The Americans did not realize that they were asking the Russians to behave in a manner foreign to their culture; they saw the difference as merely one of evolution and imagined that they were giving the Russians hints that would help them to catch up.

The Russians did not take those hints. In the Soviet Union, the wives of functionaries were private individuals whose affairs were never discussed in the media. Few knew that Yuri Andropov was married before his wife appeared at his funeral. When Gorbachev was anxious to show capitalist governments that he was a man they could do business with, he produced a glamorous wife who was not only seemed to do the same things as the American president's wife but was actually obliged to do them with her on more than one awkward occasion. The apparent Americanization, however, was only skin-deep. Raisa Gorbachev may have been a public figure in Western Europe and America, but in the Soviet Union she had never given an interview. Nobody knew her birthdate or even the number of children she had had. When Gorbachev arrived in Geneva for the 1985 summit, his wife was beside him; when he landed back in Moscow he left the aircraft by one exit and she by another. During the uncomfortable hours that she was obliged to spend with Raisa Gorbachev, Nancy Reagan was pained that her Russian counterpart did not discuss her children and her domestic arrangements or the kinds of charitable activities considered appropriate for a First Lady but instead lectured her on the theory and practice of communism. "There isn't even a Russian word for 'First Lady,' " Nancy wrote in *My Turn*.

Though Nancy Reagan and her husband were both elderly when he was elected president, she worked hard to convey an impression of physical intimacy of the most romantic kind. Whenever she was seen with the president she gazed at him with shining eyes, lips parted, like a young girl in the first flush of love. Because she was older than the usual president's wife she worked at being cuter, keeping a figure so birdlike as to suggest even less food intake than Jackie Kennedy permitted herself. As the president's star waned hers did, too; unsavory revelations about trysts with Frank Sinatra and astrological consultations began to appear in the newspapers. Once the rumor that she had a mind of her own had gained a degree of credence, there was less and less

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for Nancy Reagan to lose by revealing it. In September 1994 Nancy Reagan astonished observers by confessing that, unlike her husband, she believed in a woman's right to choose an abortion. Though she carefully distinguished this conviction from a personal belief that abortion is right, the fact that she had never agreed with her husband on this issue was now in the open. As First Lady, she had fulfilled the duty of loyal silence that takes precedence over loyalty to her own convictions.

All the contradictions in the historic role of the First Lady meet in the embattled figure of Hillary Clinton, obliged both to fill the traditional role of First Lady and to superintend the implementation of one of Clinton's most important policies, health-care reform. Hillary Rodham Clinton is probably equal to the task but, despite the visibility of American feminism, American political life is also subject to a rigid, grass-roots misogyny that can be mobilized with a speed liberals can only dream of. Though Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton have all supported the Equal Rights Amendment, adroit and effective lobbying of state legislatures ensured that it was never ratified. If her husband does not win a second term, whatever power Hillary Clinton has will be summarily withdrawn. If she herself were to run for office, she would be unlikely to win nomination, because of her association with her husband.

When Governor Clinton of Arkansas campaigned for the presidential nomination, the First Lady of Arkansas promised Democrats that they would be nominating a team rather than an individual. Subsequent revelations of Clinton's marital infidelity proved beyond a doubt that, in what most people considered its most important aspect, the team was a fraud. The Reagan partnership was successful because, on the one hand, the spouses' emotional fidelity to each other was often enacted publicly and, on the other, they never confessed their political confederacy. The Clintons courted disaster both by displaying their political confederacy and making light of sexual infidelity. The Whitewater affair confirmed the confederacy and showed it to be mischievous. Though feminists had to welcome Hillary Clinton's insistence on her competence and independence, they also had to swallow the unpalatable fact that, if her husband had not run for the highest office in the land and won, they would never have heard of her. For non-feminists, Ms. Clinton's feminism was one more reason for despising her. As many a political commentator has pointed out, a president who gives his wife political responsibility cannot fire her if she proves unequal to it. Feminists and Democrats alike might wish that Ms. Clinton had set out on a political career of her own and run for nomination and election on platforms of her own; the truth is that without her "at his side" Clinton would never have made it.

Any consideration of the First Lady's role reveals that the less power she claims, the more power she wields. During the eight years of her husband's tenancy of the White House, Nancy Reagan was probably the most powerful woman in the world, but she was careful never to display her control of the president. Instead she mimed subservience, dependence and besotted love. When she chose to throw her weight around, she could cause little beyond alarm and despondency among the White House staff; the source of her power was her manipulation of her husband, to whom she was never overbearing or even mildly critical. In the United States, the democratic structure is stable and complex enough to overwhelm and suppress any attempt by a consort to usurp power for herself. But the export of the First Lady myth has elsewhere produced farcical catastrophe. It is sobering to reflect that, in February 1986, when Marcos was deciding whether to flee, Imelda called Nancy Reagan for advice. Sadder is the uproar that eventuated in Peru when President Alberto Fujimori's wife kicked him out of the residence and attempted to run the country via her mobile phone.

For the president to bring his wife out of seclusion may seem like progress, but to dub her First Lady at the same time and to display her in every conceivable medium as such is as retrograde to the cause of human equality as the tendency to turn elected office into hereditary rulership. In a democratic world, mere relationship to an elected officeholder should simply never be a route to power. The courtesies extended to male politicians' wives in the West should never be justified in the name of equality because the duties expected of politicians' wives are demeaning and dishonorable. The fidelity of presidential marriages has always been exaggerated; for 200 years Washington wives have been expected to submerge any resentment of their husbands' peccadilloes in the political interest and to suffer their humiliations in secret. The First Lady myth was constructed out of a hypocrisy no longer practicable in an era of telephoto lenses and sophisticated listening devices managed by an unbridled and irresponsible press. The institution of coupledom is under threat. It is time that an unmarried person of either sex could serve a term or two in the White House. The running of the White House should probably be taken over by professional cooks and hoteliers instead of falling to the lot of the president's bedmate whether she happens to be talented in that field or not.

It can no longer be acceptable that a person should achieve high visibility, influence and even a degree of executive power simply because she shares a bed (or is thought to share a bed) with a head of state. In this, at least, the Communists were surely right. The old Soviet practice of allowing a politician's wife her privacy and the continued exercise of her profession is a more hopeful precedent than the one set by Nancy Reagan. With any luck, in the twenty-first century the communist model will prevail. No woman anywhere will be expected to relinquish her privacy and her own work, to diet and dress up and give interviews every day, simply because she has married a man who has a prospect of success in politics. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Tracing Patterns

In *My Dinner With André*, the Shawn-Gregory film of 1981, André tells Wally of his transfiguring experiences in far-off places. Wally replies:

> Why do we require a trip to Mount Everest in order to be able to perceive one moment of reality? Is Mount Everest more real than New York? Isn't New York real? I mean, I think if you could become fully aware of what existed in the cigar store next to this restaurant, it would blow your brains out.

I can't say if Paul Auster knows these lines, but they could almost serve as epigraph for his screenplay of **Smoke** (Miramax), except that a cigar store is only one of the important places in the film and, as in Auster novels, the quest is for something more than reality—it's for parareality, the mysteries that underlie dailiness.

An easy comparison for this film (as for Auster novels) is to a jigsaw puzzle: the pieces are interesting chiefly because they foretell a larger picture they will combine to form. For instance, the cigar-store owner, Auggie, tells us that, five years earlier, a young pregnant woman stopped in for something. He gave her exact change for her purchase. She left and, a minute later, was accidentally killed in a criminal shoot-out down this Brooklyn street. The tragedy crushed her husband, Paul, a novelist, who, five years later, when the film begins, has long been unable to write. Chatting with Paul, Auggie mourns the fact that he had exact change for Paul's wife that day. If only it had taken him a little bit longer to make change, if he had delayed her a few seconds....

Yet—without implying that it compensates for Paul's loss—if he were not now alone, he would not have invited a vagrant black teenager to crash in his place for a few days. The invitation then creates twists that enable the youth, Rashid, to find the long-lost father for whom he has been searching. This is only one example of the film's interweavings; and, once we get past Rashid's superficial reminders of *Six Degrees of Separation*, we see that his story and the others that it crosses are meant to dramatize a stark theme.

Patterns. All of us love patterns. Auster, in his fiction and in this screenplay, explores that love intensely. As in *The Music of Chance*, which was exquisitely filmed two years ago, Auster shows us that patterns are not divine, but man-made. We find, we insist on finding, patterns in everything: tornadoes, auto crashes, slaughters in restaurants by maniacs with Uzis. But the blunt fact is that most experience, no matter how grotesque, is sooner or later absorbed into human history; and after that happens, we retrospectively find some point in the disaster. Or, if it's a bright eventuality, we find some deep prior justification for it. Auster shows us how our penchant for pattern-making cossets us in the midst of chaos.

The director, Wayne Wang, is, we're told, in some measure responsible for the screenplay. A few years ago, Wang read a Christmas story of Auster's on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*, sought out Auster and suggested that they develop it into a screenplay. This they did, working backward from the original story, which is a wry account of how a deception made a Christmas cheerful. A theft in that story suggested a major segment of the finished film. (At the end of *Smoke* Auggie tells Paul that Christmas story. Paul doubts it. Then, under the closing credits, we see the story actually happening—in black and white.)

Wang is a Chinese-American whose first two films, *Chan is Missing* and *Dim Sum*, showed more promise than achievement. He made four subsequent pictures, of which I saw one, *The Joy Luck Club*. There's no stylistic connection between Wang's previous work, which was at best good ethnic celebration, and *Smoke*, which is crafted with subtle artistic intelligence. As Philip Haas did with the previous Auster film, Wang immediately sets a tone that seems a cinematic equivalent of the author's prose: patient, considerate, companiable yet sharp. Amused, almost, as it watches the antics of human beings.

Early on, in the cigar store, Paul tells some of the cigar store's usual crowd how smoke can be weighed. In an arch way, that story is symbolic of the film—paradoxically—because it symbolizes absolutely nothing about the film, other than mankind's hunger for symbology as for patterns. Wang treats the episode with just the right mixture of gravity and wit.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dreaming of Rita. *A Swedish comedy-romance, with the magnetic Per Oscarsson as an old man who still worships Rita Hayworth. His quest entangles his daughter, her husband, their children and another man. Gentle fun. (Reviewed 6/12/95)* **French Kiss.** *Seeable because of Kevin Kline's high-voltage performance as a French jewel thief with a heart of gold. Meg Ryan strains along next to him as does the plot. (5/22/95)* **A Pure Formality.** *This stagey contraption, set in a French rural police station, entertains because of Gérard Depardieu's power as a murder suspect and Roman Polanski's astounding force as the inspector who questions him. (6/19/95)* **While You Were Sleeping.** *Sandra Bullock is irresistible as the pseudo-fiancée of a comatose man who meets his very wide-awake brother. Whipped-cream puffery, delicious.(5/22/95)*—**SK**

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Paul, here and throughout, is simple and strong. He is played by William Hurt, bearded and surprisingly excellent. The surprise is in the way that Hurt speaks Auster's lines, without his customary ponderousness and conceit but with true thoughtfulness, keen inflection.

As Auggie, Harvey Keitel surprises, too. Instead of slicing off one more Keitel performance, saran-wrapped at the source, he looks for colors, shades, verity. Harold Perrineau plays Rashid with touching bravado, and Forest Whitaker is tremendous as his father. Stockard Channing has an easy part as a tough former girlfriend of Auggie's, but she avoids the usual clichés in playing toughies. Ashley Judd is vitriolic in her brief role as Channing's—and perhaps Auggie's—18-year-old daughter.

The story has a few glitches. (How did Rashid's aunt find out that he was staying with Paul?) But they fade in the film's generally quiet embrace. The idea of quiet means much to Auster and Wang. Instance: the reunion of Rashid and his father at a country garage. It's stormy. Paul and others struggle to part the fighting pair. Cut. All the parties are now sitting around a picnic table behind the garage. Silence. Paul offers the father one of his small cigars. The father offers Paul one of his large ones. More silence. Cut. It's delightful. It trusts us to supply the unseen and unsaid, and we enjoy doing it.

Collateral with the five-month Ingmar Bergman festival now running in New York—theater, film and video works—the Museum of Modern Art is showing all eighteen of Alf Sjöberg's films. Sjöberg, fifteen years older than Bergman, was a notable influence on the younger man both in theater and in film; and he directed Bergman's first produced screenplay, *Torment*, in 1944. In this Sjöberg list, I've so far seen **Karin Månsdotter** (1954), which is partly derived from Strindberg's *Erik XIV*.

The story, about the sixteenth-century Swedish king's love for a commoner, does not grip. But the film is strikingly well-made, particularly the cinematography by Sven Nykvist who, seven years later, became Bergman's cinematographer. The reason I hastened to this film is that Per Oscarsson is in it. He has only a minor role in the last section, but his freshness and vigor predict the career ahead. Thus it's another poignant reminder, like the brand-new *Dreaming of Rita*, that we have missed much of a wonderful actor's work. •

World of Our Father

BY FRANK KERMODE

God: A Biography by Jack Miles

(Knopf, 446 pp., $27.50)

The Postmodern Bible by The Bible and Culture Collective

(Yale University Press, 416 pp., $35)

Jack Miles is a learned and original critic. In an age in which such belletristic skills are commonly regarded as irrelevant or even harmful to the true business of criticism, he knows what it is to be a writer. Unusually gifted critics will sometimes choose to write peculiar books, and this is what Miles has done. A reviewer can hardly help being preoccupied with its oddity, but before yielding to that temptation he ought to say that *God: A Biography* is an admirable and absorbing achievement. Cultivated people may assume that at this date the last repetitive or disappointing word has been said on Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, the Lord God or simply God, as he or they (but not she) figured in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. They should form a large part of the audience for this book.

Miles, if one can say so without the least intention to sound disparaging, is engaged in a game, the rules of which he states very clearly. He is writing the life of God "as—and only as—the protagonist of a classic of world literature, namely the Hebrew Bible." The assumption is that the character of God can be discussed in much the way we talk about the character of Macbeth or Hamlet, by building up a fuller portrait from the suggestions in the text. Miles cites the Shakespearian critic A.C. Bradley as his authority for this procedure, not caring that Bradley's book is now almost a century old or that it has often been condemned for diverting attention from text to "character." It remains influential because its basic procedures seem close to what we all do from day to day: we form estimates of the characters of people from incomplete data. So it seems sensible enough to guess from the text of the play what sort of a person Macbeth "really" was: superstitious, uxorious, brave, cruel and so forth. It might even seem relevant to inquire, from the unclear evidence in the text, whether he and his wife had any children. And this is roughly the way Miles considers God.

There are problems. God is not a human being, though at the outset of the story he wants human beings, and lots of them, to be his mirror images. At some points he seems to behave like them, as if he were angry, jealous and so on. This anthropomorphism was a problem for older commentators. They got over it by saying that the divinely inspired text had been accommodated to the limitations of human understanding, so that when God stretched forth his arm, or repented or cursed, one wasn't to think of him as active or impassioned in the manner of a human being; such expressions were the inevitable consequence of the need to talk about him in human terms. But Miles has no use for such excuses. He takes God as he occurs in the text. If it says that God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, historians and theologians may demur or allegorize or explain away or accommodate, but according to the rules of Miles's game God did exactly that. If it states that God tells lies, has evil impulses, condones and commits reprehensible trickeries and serial genocides, and occasionally feels remorse, then it was so. And if the text neglects to record that he is married, he isn't.

The fact that the text contains differing and not always compatible accounts of God, and calls him by different names, only adds to the fun. Where historical scholarship detects variant versions, Miles perceives "divine ambivalence." The story of Adam and Eve is given in two different versions, the second of which, with its trivial prohibition and ferocious punishment, shows us that God "has two strikingly distinct personalities" and that he is the site of a terrible struggle between good and evil impulses. Miles will have nothing to do with allegory. The idea that the story of the

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prohibition, the discovery of nakedness and the expulsion from Eden, is a myth that explains fallen sexuality and death (which seemed obvious to Milton) is not canvased here. Milton was clearly appalled by the sentence of death on Adam and Eve, for we, and the creation generally, were naturally immortal, so the judgment that made us and all created things "unimmortal" struck him as very bitter. Not so Miles. He sticks to the text.

Israel may be called God's wife in one place and God's husband in another, but Miles declines to regard these as metaphors. One way or another, his God is "obsessed with reproduction"—hence circumcision, by which he takes possession of Abraham's penis—and with "the physical manifestations of reproductive fertility: nocturnal emission, menstruation, and the variety of permitted and forbidden sexual couplings" that occupy so much space in Leviticus. But unlike Baal, his rival, the Lord God doesn't go in for coupling himself, which may explain why the Baal cult was a "perennial temptation" to the Israelites.

The order of the books in the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh is not the same as that in the Christian Old Testament, and Miles sticks to the former. It offers a more or less continuous narrative from Genesis to 2 Kings ("the Deuteronomistic history," it is called, which reminds one that Miles does have recourse to historical scholarship, and also to linguistic scholarship, when he feels like it). In this narrative, the character of God can be seen to pass through several phases. He begins to recognize himself as a warrior, a lawgiver, a partner in covenants. Covenants may be, and are, broken; but he cannot simply take the obvious next step and sever his relationship with his people, because in doing so he would abolish himself.

As the story goes on, God begins to think of himself as a father to his people, and then as having a duty to be merciful, a protector of the weak. It is important to Miles's game that he represents these changes not as developing human ideas about God, but as developments in God's character. A century ago, or thereabouts, there were philosophers who argued that God must be evolving, just like his creation; the deity shows marked signs of superior adaptation as the Bible progresses, giving up blood sacrifice, and so on. But Miles is saying something different. His God has no being whatever outside the Hebrew Bible, and if he develops, it is only in the sense that Hamlet is said to develop, achieving a sort of resigned calm after much anger.

Miles's God reaches a sort of midlife crisis, and at a point marked by Isaiah 39 he discovers something about love, a subject that he had hitherto shown no interest in at all. Near the mid-point of the book, there occurs this remarkable passage:

> Perhaps because God has no life other than the one he lives through mankind ... nearly all his key experiences seem to subvert his intentions. After each of his major actions he discovers that he has not done quite what he thought he was doing, or has done something he never intended to do. He did not realize when he told mankind to "be fertile and increase" that he was creating an image of himself that was also a rival creator. He did not realize that when he destroyed his rival he would regret the destruction of his image. He did not realize that his covenant with Abraham... would require him ... to go to war with Egypt. He did not realize when he went to war with Egypt that his victory would leave him with an entire people on his hands and would require him to become a lawgiver for them and conquer a land for them to live in. He did not realize when he gave them the law that where there is law there can be transgression.... He did not realize when he began to withdraw from his alliance with Israel, after Israel's first, minor infidelities, that the aftermath would be the rise of a king, David, whose charisma would draw the Lord almost despite himself into a quasi-parental relationship with his semi-abandoned ally. He did not realize when his erstwhile ally deserted him wholesale and he made Assyria and Babylonia the tools of his vengeance that he was creating a new international role for himself. He did not realize that once they had inflicted his punishment for him, his feelings, rather than those of a vindicated suzerain, would be those of a grieving husband for a battered wife. He did not realize as he contemplated her suffering that he would find a meaning in human suffering unlike any he had ever seen before.

With such a record of incomprehension, it can fairly be said of Miles's God that like his creatures "he lives his life one stage at a time" and "is painfully unable to foresee his end in his beginning." Despite evidence of humane improvement, he is profoundly inconsistent, being at once the shepherd of Psalm 23 and the baby-butcher of Psalm 137; and as he grows older he continues to misunderstand situations of his own creation, most notably in his contest with Job. According to Miles, God's "raw power" doesn't prevail; Job wins on points, and God is rather ashamed to discover he is what Job takes him to be. Much chastened by this unexpected reversal, the Lord then loses interest in himself and in the rest of the Tanakh he speaks not another word, though he is saved from extinction by the Song of Songs, Proverbs and Ruth. Treating the Tanakh as he would any other narrative, Miles is not bothered that Ruth foresees the birth of David, who of course comes earlier, or by any similar difficulty. If you read the same material in the order provided by the Christian Bible, you would get a different result; but Miles likes the book exactly as it stands. He is not considering God as God may be considered outside his text.

If the Bible were generically a novel (admittedly a very odd one, but there are lots of odd novels) rather than a sacred text, one might want to say more about Miles's interpretive ingenuity. He is continually surprising us with the sort of move that gets marked "!" in chess reports. He plays the game very well. But I have stressed the ludic quality of his book to the extent that I may have created the impression that it is not serious. It is very serious indeed. To see, from however strange an angle, the whole of a book that we normally view through all sorts of distorting glasses, understand by means of prejudices all the harder to discard because they are usually ingrained from childhood, is a notable imaginative feat. It isn't necessary to accept Miles's account of God's character to be refreshed by his determination to base it on what is there, without recourse to devices intended to make God fit some prior notion of what he should be like. This is a new kind of fundamentalism. In its entirely different way, this book might be as instructive to students of the Bible as Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* proved some twenty years ago.

The committee that produced *The Postmodern Bible* had intentions more explicitly revolutionary. No individual claims responsibility for any of the chapters, so the badly written, chest-thumping introduction of the book must be ascribed to a corporate vainglory. The authors claim to challenge the epistemology and the disciplinary practices "that privilege the autonomous self, an ideology that values private ownership," though they were, they admit, a little sorry to lose individual nuance and subtlety in the process, and they rather touchingly thank their copy editor for achieving what might seem an impossible synthesis by "enabling us to retain ... our different voices and at the same time to speak collectively as one."

They are triumphantly sure that the age of historical criticism is all but over. An evil practice, it "brackets out the contemporary milieu" and "excludes any examination of the ongoing formative effects of the Bible." It has "implicitly veiled the historical character of biblical scholarship's entanglements with modernity and has therefore

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left unexamined its own critical and theoretical assumptions as well as the cultural conditions that produced, sustained, and validated them."

The Bible and Culture Collective, a group of mostly youthful scholars from various theological colleges, certainly does not mean to fall into these bad ways. The remedy at hand is postmodernism, obscurely but impressively defined as "modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility." All you have to do is sweep away secure notions of meaning. This is done "by radically calling into question the apparently stable foundations of meaning on which traditional interpretation is situated." These treacherous foundations support "systems of power ... that authorise or block what can be said or written about the Bible." To be rid of them will require drastic changes in institutional structures, a notion that presumably embraces the entire educational system and perhaps the political system as well. That achieved, we can hope to be "emancipated from false consciousness." Meanwhile what can truly be said about the Bible must be discovered by the application of Theory, here divided up into reader-response criticism, structuralist and narratological criticism, poststructuralist criticism, rhetorical criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist and womanist criticism and ideological criticism. Demonstrations are promised in the sequel.

Since the introduction is a manifesto, some posturing can be excused. Thereafter each chapter gives a detailed account of the approach to be employed, and it is fair to say that these expositions are very well done. If you are interested in the internecine relations of reader-response critics or the conflicting varieties of poststructuralism, this is a good place to study them. Whether the accompanying passages intended to demonstrate application of postmodernist methods to the actual texts of the Bible proves them to be useful and emancipatory is quite another matter.

There has always been controversy, for example, about the occurrence in Mark's gospel of two "feeding stories": 5,000 people are fed on loaves and fishes in Chapter 6 and 4,000 people are fed in Chapter 8. It is understandable that the disciples thought this impossible in the first instance, but it is harder to explain why they experience the same mystification the second time around. Traditional critics (who are bound to be wrong) say soberly that these are two variants of one story, and make certain suggestions as to how the repetition came about. Mark is noted for his redundancies and repetitions, linguistic as well as narrative, and they can be thought a part of his style. So the response of the historical critics is illegitimate: they aren't reading the text, they are reading something that lies concealed, they think, behind it. Yet the new version of these postmodernists, purged of institutional power and political conditioning, seems inept and even silly. The repetition is, boringly as well as improbably, described as an instance of "dramatic irony," since we know better than the disciples; and you must be "blinded by your prejudice" to accept the more plausible explanation of this obvious anomaly.

This is feeble, and it will not persuade many readers that a "shift in consciousness" has introduced a new age of self-critical clarity, much less that it is the prelude to an understanding of the connection between "hermeneutical relations" and "political power." As one reads on through these excited but accurate restatements of Theory, the impression grows that the team is far more interested in Theory than in the Bible. This is understandable, since they evidently believe there is no salvation outside the poststructuralist church.

There are moments, it is true, when the contributors affect to have their doubts. "Does poststructuralism simply

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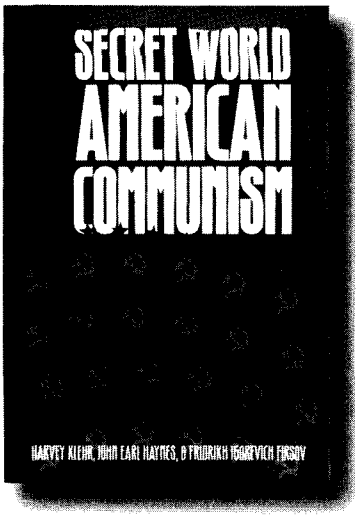

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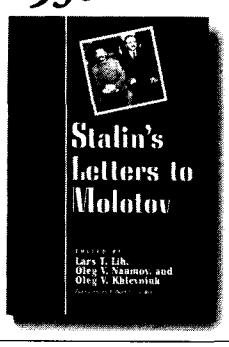

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drain away certainty and understanding, leaving us in the peculiar position of affirming only the negative?" they wonder. Perhaps, they rather surprisingly admit, "traditional historical criticism may yet be salvageable." And a postscript worries that this book is itself an "ideological gesture" (as, of course, it is). Such moments of doubt and humility are transient, but at least the tone of the postscript is refreshingly different from that of the introduction. It was one thing to condemn the great tradition of biblical criticism as dishonest and politically incorrect, and quite another to make its postmodernist replacement look as pure and purgative, intellectually and politically, as the postmodern manifesto proclaims it to be. Curiously enough, for all its trumpeting about novelty, consciousness-shifting and so forth, *The Postmodern Bible* is a far less original work than Jack Miles's biography of God.

FRANK KERMODE's memoirs, *Not Entitled*, will be published this fall by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The Writer In His Labyrinth

BY ANDRÉ ACIMAN

The Ruin of Kasch by Roberto Calasso

(Harvard University Press, 385 pp., $24.95)

I.

On April 15, 1868, a front-page article in the *Libero Cittadino* described in great detail the wedding gift that the city of Siena had presented to the heir apparent of Savoy and future king of Italy. The gift was an extraordinary pianoforte that had just returned from an exhibition in Paris. Its stately new case, carved by one of the most renowned artisans of the age, bore the image of famous composers alongside a frieze of plump and drunken cherubs—a stunning piece of work, it was said. The true prize, however, was the piano's sounding board: still intact and as waferthin as a Stradivarius, it dated back to the last decades of the ancien régime.

Known as the Siena Pianoforte, this extraordinary instrument has a story remarkably rich in chance encounters, close calls and beguiling twists of fate. Liszt played on it; Baudelaire would have raved about it had he not died the very year it landed in France; and had Roberto Calasso known of its existence, he would surely have found a way of mentioning it in *The Ruin of Kasch*.

As legend has it, the piano's sounding board was built with wood taken from the pillars of a collapsed Italian church that had once stood on the very site and foundation of an ancient Roman temple. Italy is filled with similar overlaps, but what complicates things in this instance is that the Roman temple was itself built with wooden posts stolen from none other than Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. All this has the makings of an elaborately fantastic tale and, like all fantastic tales, this one does not end here.

The Siena Pianoforte, after being stolen and ferried across the Mediterranean by German soldiers during World War II, was discovered in the Sahara by an ex-tuner from Palestine who happened to be serving in the British army. The man did not know what to make of the piano's plaster casing and sand-clogged interior, but he did manage to perform minor repairs and to hand it over to British army entertainers, who took it on tour with them throughout North Africa and back to Italy, finally selling the battered instrument to a junk dealer in Israel, where, after further turns, the piano ended in a junkyard.

Now, who should turn up in that same junkyard in Tel Aviv years later but the ex-tuner who had already rescued the instrument once before in the desert. By then, of course, the piano was hopelessly beyond repair, and as this latter-day Geppetto wrote in his journal, "the strings, keys, hammers, even the pedals had been removed. Only the plaster case and the sounding board remained." Restoration would take three years.

And the story goes on, boasting other twists involving Artur Schnabel, King Victor Emmanuel III, and a host of coincidences, all of which remind us that, as with the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew, there are certain tales that simply won't stop spinning until they have come full circle or digressed and exhausted their way to something resembling a miraculous close. The tale of the Siena Pianoforte, however, is so neatly looped, it ends with such eloquent symmetries and coincidences, that one is tempted to invoke a higher meaning, an intention behind these meanderings and providential quirks of fate that manage to bring things to such a fastidiously tidy end.

History, in this case, is a series of concentric circles coiled within each other. What started in Palestine returns to Palestine. What started in Italy returns to Italy. What started in the desert returns to the desert. Give back to Caesar.... Indeed, the tale of the nomadic pianoforte is a most fitting metaphor for eternal returns, for the almost mystical character with which anything and everything—from criminals to salmons to our psyche to the destiny of nations—seems ultimately to return to a primal scene. And perhaps history itself is little more than a trajectory both away from and back to that primal scene, a compilation of years crammed into annual rings, playing out the same humdrum drama on the stump of time.

The idea of a church built upon a temple built with plundered material from yet another temple represents a complex, archaeological vision of history long familiar to readers of Vico, Nietzsche, Joyce, Benjamin and, more specifically, to the work of the nineteenth-century German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann—Schliemann who, while digging for King Priam's Troy, uncovered, not one, but seven cities heaped on top of each other. The irony is not that Schliemann went about excavating a city by using Homer as a guide, but that, having exhumed what may have been Homer's Troy, he bypassed it and went on digging, unearthing more cities underneath.

And this multi-tiered view of history is one of Roberto Calasso's dearest tropes in *The Ruin of Kasch*, a book that one hesitates to call a novel, or an essay, or a history, or a socio-politico-anthropological study, or even a postmodernist learned meditation on literature, politics, anthropology and history. It is a difficult book, digressive, arcane, exhausting, seemingly senseless, perhaps totally senseless, spinning a vertiginously disjointed tale made up of scattered fragments stitched to numberless quotations and *faits divers*, ultimately leaving its reader as baffled and breathless as Schliemann must have felt on finally realizing that, without knowing it, he had dug a hole in King Priam's bathtub.

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In the tale of Kasch, one never knows where one is headed, much less where one has come from, or gone to. Perhaps one was never taken anywhere, and all this was one big stationary ride filled with bells, whistles, smoke and mirrors, where a sentence on Talleyrand leads to a reflection on the Satapatha Brahmana, which feeds into a reflection on Pol Pot, Goethe, Lavater and so on. One never knows what all this is really about; one learns to wait, hoping for a sign. But a sign never comes and, indeed, was never promised. Not only is Calasso's "story" about the spiritual *dépaysement* of modern man, about his total inability to understand how he got to where he is, but its very telling perpetuates this *dépaysement*, and foists it on the reader. It is about lost pianos in the desert; but the reader soon realizes that he is the lost piano in the desert. All one knows, in the end, is that the image of labyrinths, of whorls, of a subterranean imbrication of levels and meanings, informs everything one reads, or tries to read, in Calasso.

History, for Calasso, is an intricately stratified affair where the human experience is perceived in a succession of overlapping tiers. For Ovid, it was the age of gold, of silver, of bronze; for Vico, the age of gods, heroes and men—it does not matter which. What is important, however, is that these tiers presuppose a shared bedrock level called the source, the origin, the irreducible, the primal. Or, to put it somewhat differently, the state "that exists prior to the emergence of life." Any return to primal harmony is, as Freud was only too startled to realize later in his life, a return to the inorganic.

Calasso says almost the exact same thing about the Palais-Royal in Paris at the end of his book. The Palais-Royal, the "center of gravity," once known as the Palais-Cardinal, became "the Palais-Royal, then the Palais-Marchand, the Palais-Égalité, then the Jardin de la Révolution, then once again ... the Palais-Royal." Working with Walter Benjamin, Calasso weaves a mythopoetic interpretation—familiar to readers of *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, his subsequent book that appeared in English prior to this one—whereby the arcades of the Palais-Royal are perceived as mouths. With this image of mouths comes the suggestion that the Palais-Royal has become the mouth of the underworld, a "pit" where modern goods and wares—including moneychanging and prostitution—are frequently put on exhibit, as propitiatory fruits in antiquity had been displayed at the entrance to the underworld. "The galleries of royalty ... were invaded by shops, gambling, dens, cafés, brothels."

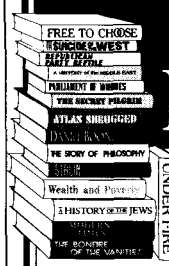
Here is the archaeological model; but it is given tenuously because, however alluring an intellectual artifact, this multi-tiered model does not reflect Calasso's true vision. Calasso believes, instead, in the dissolution of this model. And it is in the loss accompanying this dissolution that his vision begins to emerge, tragic, turgid vision that it is. Gone is the trust in origins, in bedrock, in dynasties and genealogies. Gone is de Maistre's dream of tradition and continuities, and Vico's cycles and recycles. Gone is the notion of stratifications and tiers. Gone, certainly, is the myth of an origin, of a river whose affluents are everywhere and whose source is known to all. And gone is the dream of a primal scene. There are no myths. All the storehouses are empty. Everything is exploded. The center cannot hold. As Calasso writes,

> Originally power was scattered in one place...
> Then it was joined in Melchizedek, priest and king.
> Then it was divided between a priest and a king.
> Then it was joined in a king.
> Then it was divided between a king and a law.
> Then it was joined in the law.
> Then the law was divided into many rules.
> Then the rules were scattered everywhere.
>
> ... tradition no longer enables one to claim an origin, but now conceals it. All the great and terrible enlighteners, down to Nietzsche and Freud, have been fanatical seekers of origins and genealogies.... If one could fill the gap of that missing origin, they thought, one could at least make one's way without deception all the way to the present. Then they discovered origin as deception, thus choosing the form of the deception into which *they* wanted to fall—and which would bedevil them to the last.

Instead of totalities held together by ritual memory, what one has is the squandered detritus of a once-secure universe, floating wisps of a bygone plenitude which, to alter Calasso's simile on pardoned Russian nobles brought back from Siberia, continue to haunt our cities, eager to resume their erstwhile privileges, not realizing that their places have now fallen in the hands of interlopers and new favorites. Nothing is sacred.

Here, again, is Calasso (this time laced with snippets from Léon Bloy):

> The History we are dealing with here is "synoptic and simultaneous." It is the immense carpet without borders, where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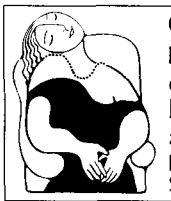
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"it is possible to juxtapose and knot tightly together, before your eyes, the most disparate or distant events," where events and comments on events and stories about events and the ghosts of events remain perpetually enmeshed on a bed of torture and pleasure, where forms and forces cannot disentangle themselves, where the gaze has always been exposed to the "terrible danger of touching symbols."

This passage says as much about the subject of the book as it does about its method. If the multi-tiered model is dissolved, then what has taken its place is not a narrative of consecutive events or a genealogy of morals, but a desperate, oneiric, whimsical exercise in spiritual and cultural rummaging, a free association of quotations lifted from the Bibliothèque Nationale, the library of Alexandria, the library of Babel. With Calasso, one never knows whether one is working with intellectual debris or with precious gems rescued in an archaeological find. And that is the problem with the book. He mixes Eastern and Western philosophy with the impish and simplifying agility of one who travels from early antiquity to late modernity without adjusting his watch.

"'I read—zigzag, backward!,'" writes Calasso, quoting Sainte-Beuve. "'What's the difference?... The richer the blend of colors and the more frequent the interruptions, the more I advance through this book, in which you always find yourself in the middle.'" Elsewhere, writing of Jung, Calasso might as well have been thinking of himself: "The true historian, then, is the one who crosses the garrulous wasteland of archives to arrive, with a bit of luck, at the right dust-covered folder, at those rare points where deafening names begin to resonate among themselves ... and take on a unique outline." And here again is Calasso quoting Sainte-Beuve, writing about Chateaubriand, writing about Rancé: "... this book, which we thought would be simple and austere, has become, as a result of the author's negligence and lack of seriousness, a genuine piece of bric-à-brac. The author flings everything into it, scrambles everything, empties all his cupboards."

Calasso's cupboards are indeed colossal. One understands why, given the urgent search for undisclosed, unrecoverable subterranean rumbles, Calasso needs to draw on everything he has read. And he has read everything. *The Ruin of Kasch* is a dazzling montage of references to a host of writers—as awesome and as awful as a Hydra that keeps dropping new names each time you thought you had sealed its mouth. It would take approximately two pages to name every author mentioned in this book. Suffice it to say that he manages to refer in passing, in the space of about twenty pages, to Marx, Burkhardt, Tocqueville, the Cardinal de Retz, Rancé, Chateaubriand, Michelet, Goethe, Coleridge, Freud, Polybius, Lévi-Strauss, Sade, Guénon, Santillana, Bentham, Mill, Ernst Cassirer, Frances Yates, Simone Weil, Rosa Luxemburg, Kafka, Scholem, Adorno, Horkheimer and Heidegger.

II.

Everything in Calasso's universe has fallen apart. The center does not hold, because the very principle that keeps the center in place has been exploded. This is the principle of legitimacy, or as Calasso tiresomely keeps calling it, the *rta*, which in Sanskrit means order, harmony, the connection between heaven and earth. Legitimacy, for Calasso, represents a principle with overarching claims to truth, the divinely ordained, the sacred, the timeless. Legitimacy is the axis around which the earth turns, the principle that aligns body to soul to universe. Legitimacy sanctions our governments, validates our institutions, safeguards our boundaries and keeps our credit and currency systems floating.

Play with the concept of legitimacy, disrupt it, abuse it, and you dislodge the entire orbit of civilization. When this happens, you do not just disturb the harmony between man and the universe, mind and matter, time and place, and so on. You disinherit man, you erase all vestiges of the primal scene and along with it the dream-memory of a primal Adamic language that "expresses the secret name of things." Without origin you have no legitimacy, and without legitimacy you have no place. You are an outcast—illegitimate, an anchorless, rudderless, wandering Jew.

The Ruin of Kasch tells the story of traditional societies that have suddenly spun out of orbit and lost their defining sense of legitimacy. To illustrate the point, Calasso gives two parables. Let us start with the second, from which the book gets its title. A small kingdom called Kasch, with a law requiring its priests to sacrifice the king at a time appointed by astrological signs, finds itself imperceptibly challenged by a newcomer. This newcomer possesses a singular skill: he can tell tales. The entire court along with the priests are so taken by the power of this man's tales that they begin to neglect their duties, and no longer watch the heavens for the much-awaited sign of the prescribed sacrifice. Indeed, this singer of tales so bewitches everyone that he not only becomes the future king of Kasch but, in effect, disrupts the entire sacrificial foundations of that society and, by so doing, the society itself. Kasch, having abandoned its own values, will eventually be destroyed.

This parable is followed by a long meditation on the meaning of sacrifice. The reason for the association of sacrifice with legitimacy is complicated, and it derives in good part from a confusion at the very heart of Calasso's narrative. The narrative goes something like this: at the beginning man was connected to the heavens and everything was good. Then some unknown hand touched the poles of the earth and everything went bad. All truth was suspended, all deals revoked, and man's entire spiritual base annihilated. What lay at that spiritual base? Calasso's answer is simple: sacrifice.

Sacrifice—derived from the Latin *sacer* or holy, and *facere* or to make, or make holy—was the oldest way of propitiating fate, of negotiating with adversity and engaging the whimsical divine. It is the "invisible cord between divinity and creation," a ritual enacted in the belief that, for everything we give up, we receive something in return. This is the meaning of sacrifice, and the ultimate sacrifice is invariably paid with one currency alone: life. That life can be easily dispensed with does not mean that it is cheap, but that it is the absolute means with which one bargains with the universe, with luck, with the gods.

Now, once this sacrificial pact is unsaddled, man is left with nothing. He cannot communicate with eternity. Calasso, of course, is not advocating a return to spirituality by violence or sacrificial murder. There is no going back to Kasch. *The Ruin of Kasch* is really about the nostalgia of a modern man who would have wanted things to endure as they had in the old days. In this respect, Calasso is yet another one of those intellectuals who for more than 100 years now have set for themselves a dual mission: to indict the modern world by denouncing its latter-day materialist myths, and to extol the old myths and lament the passing of the golden age. From Vico and Rousseau down to Nietzsche, Jung, Foucault and others, we have been subjected to the notion that no matter how ruthless and bloody the barbarism of the senses, it was always preferable to modern man's barbarism of the spirit. In this respect, Vico's "extremes of delicacy... under soft words and embraces" will always lose out to "generous savagery and primitive simplicity."

There is a third way, of course, for the modern mythographer: to expose the

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persistence of very old myths and rituals in the modern world. In this case, even the free-thinking, post-logical, autonomous individual of modernity is shown to be governed by vestigial ancient myths that are no less ruthless or spellbinding now as they ever were. But it is at precisely this juncture that we encounter confusion in Calasso's book. Has the power of old sacrificial myths and rituals disappeared from today's world? Yes, but not quite. What has taken place instead, Calasso writes, is a progressive etiolation of these sacrificial rites: "men killed other men and dedicated them to an invisible power.... Then they killed without dedicating the victims to anyone.... Afterwards, nothing remained but pure killing."

But have these powers disappeared? Again, yes and no. It suits Calasso—as it suits any post-Romantic thinker—to censure the modern world for being godless, *ahnungslos* or omenless, entirely desacralized. But he wishes also to censure the modern world for presuming to have risen above its mythic origins in the name of enlightened rationalism. And he does this by showing that the sacrificial practices that make every savage a savage have not disappeared but persist, though in more perverted, uglier, underground ways, and without the attendant spirituality that somehow—I say somehow because the issue is never really resolved—justified them in ancient times.

In this view of history, all that modern man has done is to take the old rituals and de-sacralize them and then, in the nightmare version of Jünger or Marinetti, mechanize them. To cite but a few examples from Calasso: when the West experiments with animals in the name of progress, it is doing little more than practicing an updated form of sacrifice, and when it engages in assembly-line manufacturing, it is turning the earth into a "great sacrificial workshop." Sacrifice is replaced by experiment, as technology ultimately supplants magic and witchcraft. Even our judicial system shows that what we have done is take "guilt, which belongs to the sacrifice ... and immediately displaced in onto the victim." And what was the Holocaust, if not a burnt offering in the name of "housecleaning, physiological evacuation"? In short, the only conclusion that one could draw from all this is that modern man, for all the residual sacrificial component present in his life, remains essentially uninterested in, suspicious of, unfamiliar with and totally incapable of encountering, the sacred. He will always be cut off from the timeless, the holy, and ultimately from himself.

Ironically—and this is typical Calasso—this very "expulsion of the sacred" from modern life turns out to have been the unstated purpose of all sacrifice, ancient or modern. And so we are back to where we started. Which is also typical of Calasso. Sacrifice makes sacred, but it does so to rid life of the sacred. Interesting. But Calasso never works out the gnarled contradictions that he brandishes. Instead, he hides behind the esoteric shadow of his learned eclecticism, threading his way between the arch-conservatism of de Maistre and the abject philosophy of Stirner, piling image on top of image only to lament that we moderns are totally barred from the divine—that we moderns are without poetry, without soul.

We are not, however, without reason. And some of us care to understand what we read. What was it, exactly, that went wrong and de-sacralized modern man? Does the death or the perversion of sacrificial practices really lie at the root of this modern Fall? Or is the entire question of sacrifice merely a symbol, a metaphor for a loss that is always subsumed but whose magnitude can never be fathomed? Is Calasso a "nostalgist," treading in the footsteps of Rousseau, Herder, Hamann, Lévy-Bruhl? Or is he a committed reader of Simone Weil, Ernst Jünger and Georges Bataille, whose vitalism and irrationalism will always cast a sinister spell on modern man's allegedly naïve and ill-fated belief in reason, progress and tolerance? Calasso provides no answers. Their absence is frustrating and confusing. And a part of this confusion was already obliquely suggested in the other, more enigmatic tale told in *The Ruin of Kasch.*

III.

The other tale in this book, Calasso's first parable, centers on the career of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, Prince of Benevento, child of the ancien régime and survivor of the Revolution, Talleyrand the chameleon, the man of infinite skill, the arch-diplomat whose "greatest strength," writes Henry Kissinger, "lay in the dexterity of his manoeuvres, in the manipulation of the principles of others..."; Talleyrand, who "possessed the same nonchalance, the same subtlety, and an even more trenchant wit" than Metternich; Talleyrand, who is credited with using the concept of legitimacy during the Congress of Vienna and who, with this word alone—this is Calasso, not Kissinger—confuses and manipulates the enemies of France, brandishing legitimacy in a world that did not quite realize legitimacy was already a sterile concept.

Like the teller of tales in Kasch, Talleyrand is a weaver of words—and we are indeed in a world where the "reign of the word... follows that of blood," where delicacy follows savagery, where style is the last weapon and where "protocol is the last power for protecting abandoned symbols." For Talleyrand is a man who is all style, who "managed to betray everything, with the exception of style," a man who never says, but "only hints," who "helps chaos assume an acceptable form."

Talleyrand, the man of all seasons whom Napoleon once branded an ordure in silk stockings, was a legitimate aristocrat who managed to outlive many governments. He was himself the personification of many tiers, "the flotsam of three different tides: bishop of the ancien régime, sacrilegious drafter of revolutionary texts, minister of Napoleon," post-Revolutionary diplomat and politician. Talleyrand is "a collection of every vice, a model of betrayal and corruption" who has "the half-closed eye of a dying viper," "a metaphysician incognito to everyone, including to himself." Goethe, who understood that most people have an inside and an outside, and that the outside is not entirely severed from the inside, gave up when it came to Talleyrand: "His gaze is utterly impenetrable," he said. It was, in fact, entirely detached and cut off from everything else.

It is difficult to make out Calasso's tale here. What exactly is the nature of the evil perpetrated by Talleyrand? Did he misappropriate the concept of legitimacy? Or was he a legitimist groping in a world where only the word legitimacy existed, a man excluded from his "natural position" because of a childhood infirmity? Or was Talleyrand an interloper, the first illegitimist, the man who wrought chaos? Was he the last beacon, the last *douceur,* of the eighteenth century, or the true undoer of the old régime, the *douceur* turned into putrefaction, into money? It is hard to tell.

And what does Talleyrand really have in common with the man who drugged the entire kingdom of Kasch with his voice and his words? And what—since we're asking—does Talleyrand and the spinner of tales really have to do with an almost 100-page disquisition on the subject of sacrifice? And why—let's come to the point—is the whole thing so unremittingly tiresome? As Calasso said in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* "the gods get bored with men who have no stories." The gods are never wrong.

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Calasso is a tendentious writer. He works with nudges and footsies, weaving imagery and argument, logic and metaphor. For example, he will discuss the Ancient Mariner, mention the albatross, and since we're in the bird-sea-fish imagery, add something like "the whiteness of those wings expanded into the immense wrinkled brow of Moby-Dick," and then he will throw off our attention by mentioning *The 120 Days of Sodom* and then—bang!—back to the Pequod and Moby-Dick. In another instance, after discussing Lautréamont and Stirner, Calasso steers us back to Marx, Engels and the Russian underground. And while we're on the subject of undergrounds, why not throw in Dostoevsky? *Notes from Underground,* remember?

Calasso's writing is always skidding, drifting between quotations, name-dropping, and far-fetched associations, all of which, braided together, try to persuade the reader that he is confronted with a most important argument. But Calasso's argument, for all its imponderable difficulty, is not terribly new or terribly deep. (To quote Nietzsche, it isn't even shallow.) With his allegorical broad sweeps, he speaks with the visionary, hyperbolic grandiloquence of prophets, seers and madmen, of thinkers whose incomprehensibility is pardoned under the misguided notion that all this must surely add up to something. But does it?

There is something at once clunky and clamorous in his prose. Many times he writes in an aphoristic style, but his aphorisms are without éclat, and almost always fall flat, like soaked gunpowder. "The nausea provided by an excess of sweetness corresponds to the moment when the sacrifice should take place. One is nauseated because one feels guilty for having avoided the sacrifice." Meaning? "Sacrifice does not serve to expiate guilt, as the textbooks say. Sacrifice is guilt—the only one." Interesting; but the "only one"? "The din of applause drowns out the victim's cries. When the movie star or the politician is killed for being 'too famous,' it is said that the murderer is mad. But his madness reveals the origin of the applause." Or, "Myth, if not repeated, wastes away and finally dies like the gods—dies many deaths." Or, "All secret services share a mission that is far more important and far more effective than all their conflicts: the annihilation of secrecy." Or, "One day the United States discovered that it was an empire. But it didn't know what an empire was. It thought that an empire was merely the biggest of all corporations." And so on, and on. Sometimes it can get ugly. "The cake of the idle, which had exuded sweetness, is cut with blind equity by the guillotine." Please!

Calasso's book is not without its charms. There are priceless, even exquisite moments, such as Stendhal's narrative of Talleyrand filling the Bois de Boulogne with rabbits so that Napoleon might think himself an accomplished marksman. Well and good. After 385 pages, however, I find it impossible not to paraphrase Wilde. It took two men eight years to translate *The Ruin of Kasch.* To read it should take one at least sixteen.

Sea-Blue Aubade

Dawn—or is it sea-blue—fills the square.
Two in a room asleep with that window.
And dark thinning inside the view.
And human breathing.
And freedom in the room like a thin gray floating.
And doctrine.
And other kinds of shine rising off the edges of things—
as if the daylight were a doctor arriving,
each thing needing to be seen....
Soon the sunlight
will want to be changed.
Will want to be caught up in the weavings of freedom.
To be caught up in the wide net and made to have edges—
light coming in, so acidly, with the strength of wind or an ox....
Outside, slowly, the grapes seem fatter.
The cat moves its tail once in sleep.
The silence is largest wherever an eye falls.
Somebody's glance smokes through the blues until they start to
feel...?
But it is all chalky.
All asleep, all unalive.
An icy thing, even in its fluency—
the tree, the stone heroically built-up into a wall,
each stone in the mind of its mason, elsewhere, asleep,
the cat in the sleep of its owner, the purple light, muscular,
more days, more nights, more roads, shouts, flowers,
all making towards what pebbled shore,
each changing place with that which went before—
and forwards, forwards, how it all contends,
across the crookedness to be itself, to be at last, the crown,
the jeweled asterisk that stops that very moment still,
the place the parallels, the cruelties, *do*, for just a fraction
of a pebbled instant,
meet—(save that I die I leave my love alone)—
possibly rain oncoming—on the sidewalk down below
could it be steps, or is it just the clock?—
does it arrive and dissipate?—
no, it splatters like
thousands of thoughts,
replacing all the listening—
sea of ideas—so blue—
although you can hear something like cuts in the blue—
and one can feel how the boat feels—
all of the freedom swirling and slapping round the keel, the here,
foaming round, as feelings—and still the pitch of the dawn
grasping at transparence, as if something like an *hour* were
trying
to plash in, and make, and make...? what would it *make*?—
and in the suddenly awakening one:
an upward glance, one take—a main-mast starting up—
sails glimpsing about, quick rules and suppositions—coalescings—
and then the single sturdier open gaze cast up: a stare: a fear:
why is father lashed to it?
why is mother singing?

JORIE GRAHAM

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IV.

For all the international acclaim that Roberto Calasso's books have earned him, they have also brought him his share of headaches. Recently they have placed him at the center of a rather Euro-style controversy, shrill, strident, petty and mean, a controversy that would have had all the trademarks of a seasonal *querelle buffa* if its underlying character were not so sordid. In a recent book called *The "Adelphi" of Dissolution*, Maurizio Blondet, the Vatican reporter for *L'Avvenire*, launched an all-out attack on Calasso and on Adelphi Edizioni, one of Italy's most prestigious publishing houses, headed by Calasso himself. Blondet brands Calasso a promulgator of esoteric, satanic, pagan and Gnostic knowledge. He also deems him a member of a most pernicious brotherhood of Gnostic initiates (*adelphos* in Greek means brother) plotting to let loose a host of diabolical forces upon the world and undermine Western, Christian values.

According to Blondet, the forms and the names that these pernicious forces have assumed over the ages are legion: nihilism, shamanism, Shaktism, anti-clericalism, mysticism, hermeticism, Gnosticism, socialism, decadence, debauchery, down to the great "pooling of blood" at the source of AIDS—in short, destructive and orgiastic forces that Blondet says are incorporated in Shiva, the god of destruction and reproduction. The list of *bêtes noires* is familiar enough; they are all the cousins of the Antichrist. Published by the publishing house Ares, a house related to Opus Dei and therefore to the Catholic clergy, the book's attack is ostensibly two-pronged: on Calasso, for his visionary yet almost nostalgic, prurient interest in myth, the occult, sacrifice and primitive religions; and on Adelphi, for its eclectic catalog of recognized though almost always provocative classics, classics that Blondet claims epitomize the "radical chic" and "leftist snobbery" of its editorial *petite bande*.

Petite bande or not, however, the Adelphi catalog is impressive and includes such names as Canetti, Satie, Stirner, Isaiah, Yeats, Kenko, Job, Artaud, Jarry, Wittgenstein, Joseph Roth, Kundera, von Hofmannsthal, Tolkien, Djuna Barnes, Simone Weil, Bruce Chatwin, Nietzsche, Leonardo Scaiscia, Clarice Lispector, Thomas Bernhard, and probably one of the best selections of Karl Kraus's dicta available in translation, which was compiled by Calasso himself. It is impossible not to be struck by the absence of many Italian writers in the Adelphi catalog or by the exceptional breadth and wealth of its offerings. And it is senseless to attempt to derive an overweening sense of the "philosophy" of Adelphi's stewards merely by judging the catalog. Adelphi is the envy of every publishing house in the world. It is in the black and it almost never publishes junk.

Adelphi, claims Blondet, knows how to use Christian authors to slander Christian values and to promote its Gnostic agenda. There is a weird, pre-modern (in truth, anti-modern) character to this attack on Calasso. Its echoes are ugly. And there is more. Who were the people present at the inception of Adelphi? They were Roberto Bazlen, who died in 1965, and Luciano Foá, who is still involved with the firm. Both of them are Jewish. And so are a very large number of names thrown about in Blondet's pamphlet. Some are Jews, others are Jewish converts to Christianity.

What is the relationship between the attack on Gnosticism and the fact that Bazlen, who defined Adelphi's agenda, is Jewish? Well, the connection is flimsy. On the one hand, Bazlen himself was very interested in mysticism, in Taoism, in Jung, Nietzsche and Kafka. On the other, the connection is rooted in a sentence that Blondet paraphrases from Robert Grant's *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, to the effect that early-Christian Gnosticism, rather than claim its origins in Greek thought, derives from a complex of Jewish heresies. With this distinction Blondet probably wants to show that he is not attacking Jewish thought, only heretical Jewish thought. If one gets the impression from Blondet's book that there is an international Jewish conspiracy, it is a conspiracy of Gnostics, of anti-clerics, of *petite bandes*, of dubious converts, but not a worldwide conspiracy of big-time Jewish power mongers. Set aside this specious distinction, however, and you might as well be reading *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

"The community we are discussing," writes the Vatican reporter, "is—let us keep in mind—a homogeneous group, bound not only by business concerns but by a deep and concealed solidarity." Sounds familiar? In fact, the conspiracy being investigated under all this talk of Gnosticism and Shamanism and neopaganism is not much more than the same, age-old Jewish conspiracy that has haunted the Western imagination for almost a millennium. Blondet now identifies it among the supporters of Mazzini's Republicanism in nineteenth-century Italy, among Jewish financiers and Young Turks (of Jewish extraction) responsible for toppling the Ottoman sultanate, or among the Frey brothers who landed in Paris and tried to steer the French Revolution to suit their own financial schemes.

But what about Calasso? Wait. The organization of Young Turks, modeled after Mazzini's "Young Italy"—note the long reach of Jewish manipulation from Italy to Turkey—finds itself "mysteriously involved" in a banker's financial aspirations in Turkey. This banker, called Joseph Toeplitz, is Jewish and heads the Banca Commerciale Italiana (BCI), Italy's most independent bank and one with a long history of multinational transactions. And things can get even more confusing. The Sabbatean movement, outlawed in the Ottoman Empire, did not dissipate after the conversion of the Jewish pseudo-messiah Shabtai Tsvi to Islam in 1666; it went underground, only to resurface in a virulent new form as Frankism, an antinomian movement that swept through Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century, headed by Jacob Frank. Blondet is alarmed by what he calls subversive Frankism—a secularized branch of the Frankist movement to which he suggests Adelphi's Roberto Bazlen was associated. And Frankist families also migrated to the United States. Some of their names are familiar. Blondet informs us that Louis D. Brandeis had on his desk a portrait of Eva Frank, the saintly daughter of Jacob Frank. Irma Brandeis, the jurist's third cousin, had even known Roberto Bazlen. And Blondet adds a new name to the list of Frankist nineteenth-century immigrants: Rohatyn, not realizing that the Rohatyn he would like to evoke was not even born in the United States. Does it matter? Not really. The town of Rohatyn is known to have hosted Frankists.

There are other similar figures cropping up in Blondet's little book. They highlight the connection between subversive spirituality and subversive high finance: Ignatius Timothy Trebitsch-Lincoln, a Jewish apostate, Anglican, MP, financier, Buddhist, spy, counterspy, two-time traitor, alias Chao King; and Alexander Israel Lazarevich Helfand, known as Parvus, a financier, arms and grains merchant, who aside from being one of the leaders of the failed 1905 revolution in Russia, was, like Toeplitz, a financial adviser of the Ottoman government, and who was responsible for giving the Germans the idea of letting Lenin return to Russia in a sealed car. All of them—and there are more—are wandering Jews. Notice the singular lack of allegiance and loyalties, the superimposition of careers and religions, the feverish and resourceful frittering from one place to another, and

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always that subterranean network of worldwide contacts.

Which brings us, sort of, to Adelphi. Raffaele Mattioli, who took over the BCI from Joseph Toeplitz, was a well-known anti-cleric and anti-fascist, a humanist and a patron of the arts, a man who managed to save many Jews from the Holocaust by hiring them into his bank. More importantly, Mattioli is known to have created an intellectual milieu which included leftists, artists, Jungians, Jews, and men who were such vehement anti-fascists that they proposed a peace agreement with the Americans while Italy was still at war. (Imagine!) Many of them have exerted an influence over Adelphi.

What all this has to do with Roberto Calasso, one of Italy's most respected men of letters, is really beyond imagining. All this is, in fact, is an amazing attempt to tie loose threads over a span of 2,000 years and arrive at a genealogy and at an intellectual pedigree for a writer who understands pedigrees and genealogies far too well to be so easily pigeonholed. This awful screed seems to be about a pervasive Gnostic presence in the Adelphi catalog, but it is really about Jewish insurrectionists, Jewish financiers and Jewish conspiracies. One can just wonder what Blondet would have said had he known that Calasso had written on Sir Thomas Browne, one of the more esoteric authors in the English language, explorer of Christian paradoxes and author of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, otherwise known as *Vulgar Errors*, which is a fitting title for Blondet's book.

Still, there is an irony here; or more precisely, the injustice is a little poetic. The portentous apparatus of arcana larded on *The Ruin of Kasch* has been thrown back at its author and has come, as the saying goes, to haunt him. All this scatter of information, so intricately woven by Calasso, is now snatched by a foul sorcerer's apprentice who, with a far less expert hand, has managed to fashion another equally intricate pattern in this ever more knotty cat's cradle of ideas. Esotericism has been visited on the esotericist. It is a tawdry parable about the importance of clarity, rationality, modernity.

ANDRÉ ACIMAN, who teaches French literature at Princeton University, is the author most recently of *Out of Egypt* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

Behind the Scenes

BY COLETTE BROOKS

Mrs. Jordan's Profession by Claire Tomalin

(Knopf, 414 pp., $27.50)

At midpoint in her account of an ill-starred eighteenth-century love affair, after the general outline of a ruinous end has been rendered and we await presentation of the particulars, Claire Tomalin offers a summary judgment of her subject's fate: "We can see, with hindsight, that it would have been better if she had never met him." The remark has a curiously modern ring; it can serve as the epitaph for many a contemporary misalliance. Though Tomalin's lovers constitute a rather narrowly drawn demographic group—she was the most celebrated English actress of her day, he was a ne'er-do-well who became, quite unexpectedly, King—most of us can recognize the rueful sentiment.

But the familiar pronouncement also resonates on another level. It just happened, it didn't work out, it would have been better if she had never met him: these common expressions are contemporary formulations of Fate, our version of the ancient wheel of fortune. In this view, the universe is reduced to an intimate realm in which we watch, helplessly, as events play out around us. The very idea of human agency is suspect: chance rules and luck, as the song goes, is sometimes a lady, sometimes not. Cross your fingers, spin the wheel, what happens, happens.

Such an attitude toward experience tends to scant issues of class, race, gender and free will, but it possesses its own considerable complexities. An uncertain world is rife with peril; one needs all the guidance one can get. Some of us read runes, others books. Tomalin's book is a cautionary tale, a primer on the distribution of risk and reward in a society that in many ways resembles our own. It is also, as in any love story, a study of men and women assiduously making all sorts of missteps.

Tomalin has written several noted biographies, focusing on stories of formidable women who would otherwise remain unheralded or invisible (such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Nelly Ternan, Charles Dickens's mistress of thirteen years who was carefully hidden away). The lineaments of her tale here are simple enough. Dora Jordan was born in London in 1761, the daughter of an obscure worker and struggling actress who never married but produced nine children together. When Jordan's father abandoned the family, moving on to another woman with whom he started a second family, 14-year-old Dora was forced to help support her siblings. ("Her childhood," as Tomalin puts it, "was at an end.")

Like many other young women in the eighteenth century who had few apparent skills or prospects, Jordan took to the stage. Unlike the others, she transfixed audiences from the start. She was wildly popular in her early appearances in the provinces, where she specialized in Shakespeare's comic roles and farces. A few years later she made her London debut at Drury Lane, the most prestigious theater in England, and in short order became a star. "She came to town with no report in her favour," one contemporary wrote, but "auditors were boundless in their plaudits, and so warm in their praises when they left the theater that friends at home would not give credit to the extent of their eulogiums." William Hazlitt offered a simpler explanation of her power: "there was no one else like her." Coleridge and George III, among legions of others, became professed admirers. Jordan found herself, in her 20s, one of the most renowned women in the realm. And she made twice as much money annually as Boswell.

Her story unfolds like a fairy tale, but darkened by the ever-present possibility of a fall from grace or favor. For one thing, she was a woman, and for members of that sex fortune had always proven particularly fickle. (Virginia Woolf, surveying English life up to the modern era, was repeatedly struck by "the safety and security of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other.") Though Tomalin makes no special point of it, she surely takes her title from George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, in which Shaw surveys the state of Victorian England and makes his celebrated case for the economic rationale of prostitution.

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In a society that shamefully undereducates, undervalues and overworks women, his title character declares, "the only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her." If she is fortunate, the man will marry her, but such legal commitments must be considered a luxury (as is talk of love). The woman who wishes to escape destitution will make her peace with necessity and do what she must. Shaw makes a nominal distinction between working professionals and ordinary women, as it were, but for all intents and purposes his harsh metaphor holds for any woman who lacks the means to sustain life or spirit. And, just in case one is tempted to muddy the argument with pietistic indictments of such fallen souls, he makes his own position clear in the preface that he appended to the play: "Society, and not any individual, is the villain of the piece."

These economic hazards were mirrored by the physical uncertainties that beset women of that earlier era. Lacking reliable methods of contraception, sexually active women of childbearing age could expect to find themselves in a state of almost constant pregnancy. (The numbers are daunting: women routinely bearing ten, eleven, twelve children and suffering multiple miscarriages.) Childbirth itself proved especially perilous; it was not uncommon for women to write letters of farewell to loved ones before going into "confinement." Tomalin's biography of Mary Wollstonecraft poignantly underscores this hazard: just as the account is gathering momentum, as Mary in full possession of her powers expects to write a second major book, she dies of infection at the age of 38 after delivering her second baby. (The child survived, went on to write *Frankenstein* and to marry Shelley.)

The picture that Tomalin sketches in these books is stark. Women with limited options struggle mightily to maintain themselves and their children, often without perceptible assistance from the errant partners they love and hope in vain to keep. But Dora Jordan seemed to overcome these hurdles handily. As a successful actress, she was an amalgam of contradictions: strikingly independent yet the personification of traditional erotic allure (and shame). Along with Mrs. Warren and her ilk, the actress in the eighteenth century was one of the few sexualized women permitted to appear as such in public. The very act of displaying oneself on a stage was itself provocative. (We must allow, of course, for the power of suggestion: women of that time were so encumbered by clothing that one glimpsed the female form only when the actress played a male part. In breeches, as a contemporary put it, Jordan "sported the best leg ever seen on the stage.") Randy aristocrats often ardently wooed actresses offstage; they, in turn, sometimes seized the chance to abandon the difficult life and marry. Many others became the mistresses of well-heeled men.

Such power to arouse passions provoked equally intense public censure, as has long been the case. Elizabethan and Jacobean drama resounds with lavishly drawn femmes fatales who bedazzle and destroy any hapless male whom they encounter. (Movies such as *Fatal Attraction* present updated incarnations of this enduring mythic figure.) In reality, Jordan was the least licentious of ladies. She cherished her professional life but aspired to a secure domesticity. She had had one child at the age of 20, the result either of rape or of a girlish infatuation that soon faded; the father drifted away and she assumed sole responsibility for the baby. (They had never married: "Mrs. Jordan" was a stage name given her for the sake of propriety.)

In London, she fell in love and lived for five years with a man who fathered two more children. He, too, shrunk from marrying her, though she exerted as much pressure as was seemly. There is some evidence that Dora was surprised at his hesitation; perhaps she had never mastered the "strict sexual bargaining" skills that Tomalin notes other girls were taught along with needlepoint. In any case, after many a broken promise Jordan's fairy-tale life had begun to lose its luster. As luck would have it, however, her prince appeared. He was William Duke of Clarence, third son of the king of England and an avid theatergoer. They fell in love. She had met the man to whom she would devote herself for the next twenty years. They would have ten children together. She would remain a celebrated performer and the financial mainstay of the de facto family.

Had the Jordan story ended here, it would have had a manifestly happy ending. But fate (or the royal family) was to decree otherwise. Marriage to such a woman was unthinkable, and Prince William would ultimately leave her—or dump her, in the crueler argot of our day—in order to make a socially acceptable liaison. Some years later, in another twist of fortune, the Duke became King William IV. Since his children by Dora were illegitimate ("with the King they die," as one royal put it), his eldest child George, capable and winning, could hardly hope to gain the crown. He ultimately killed himself. The throne passed upon William's death to his niece Victoria and the rest, as they say, is history, and a case study in the allocation of scarce resources. Dora did not live to witness this turn of events. She died alone and in financial difficulty. Her name was nowhere to be found in William's official biography, the record altered to remove all traces of his abiding error.

"It would have been better if she had never met him." Perhaps so, but it is difficult to imagine Jordan's life taking a different shape. The force of brute fact lends the final account an air of inevitability, as though it could not possibly have worked out any other way. And if the course of the individual life seems immutable, so does that of the age: Who can imagine the nineteenth century without Victoria at its helm? The woman who might have remained merely a princess became queen and defined her era. And so the wheel spins.

Tomalin depicts Jordan as a victim of sorts, but such a verdict does not seem altogether apt. She suffered at the end, certainly, but for most of her life she lived very well. She was born with a singular gift, and was able to devote herself for forty-some years to work that she found profoundly satisfying. Jordan herself was fully aware of her good fortune: "I begin to feel that acting keeps me alive," she wrote in later years. (She had been pronounced a "degraded woman" by *The London Times*, but continued to appear triumphantly on stage.) She was a resolutely dedicated mother who strove to shelter her children from scorn; they, in turn, were devoted to her. Her loving (and monogamous) relationship with William lasted two decades. And throughout her life Jordan freely shared her good fortune with others, supporting a large extended family and endowing charities, among them a Female Friendly Society for needy women and children. No, there seems no cause for pity in this account.

But there is one figure who haunts this book, though her story takes up only a few paragraphs in its many pages. It is Jordan's eldest daughter Fanny, the "natural child" born to the poor 20-year-old girl who was illegitimate herself, the bastard born of a bastard who had the bad luck to possess no royal blood whatsoever. Jordan's five daughters by the Duke were eventually absorbed into the aristocracy, consorting with the likes of Metternich and Talleyrand at social affairs Jordan herself could not attend, but there were no such prospects for Fanny.

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Jordan worried about the girl her entire life. Her earliest communications to the Duke were colored by pleas that he extend his protection to the child. "Set my mind totally at [ease] with respect to her, and I will be yours forever ... she is the only rival you can ever have in my heart."

If this were really a fairy tale, Fanny would have flourished, becoming a well-adjusted member of a society that wished her only well. But this was not to be. She grew up aggrieved, resentful of a world that confirmed her worst expectations at every turn. (She was certainly spirited; at one point she wrote hostile letters to the Duke on behalf of her mother, one of the few who dared to reprove him.) She made a doomed marriage to a nondescript man who squandered the little money they had and left her. Then she determined to follow her mother upon the stage, but there she failed, as she possessed neither sufficient talent nor beauty. (As Hazlitt put it, Fanny was "no more like her mother, 'than I to Hercules'.") Eventually, in one last spin of the wheel, she endeavored to leave England and begin a new life in America. The Duke paid her passage.

But it didn't work out. Less than a year later, at the age of 39, Fanny killed herself in New York City. She left behind a little girl whose name has been lost to history, just one more of the "infinitely obscure lives" (in Woolf's phrase) that will remain forever unrecorded. And so it is not Dora but Fanny, and all the women like her, who one thinks of upon closing this book. What a life it might have been. What a life it was.

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Youth and Consequences

BY MICHAEL GORRA

Wonder Boys by Michael Chabon

(Villard Books, 368 pp., $23)

It starts well. "The first real writer I ever knew was a man who did all of his work under the name of August Van Zorn. He lived at the McClelland Hotel, which my grandmother owned, in the uppermost room of its turret, and taught English literature at Coxley, a small college on the other side of the minor Pennsylvania river that split our town in two." Already the peculiarly American resonance begins to catch you, the note of the young man from the provinces who has begun to discover a wider world. It is the voice of Nick Carraway and also of the young Nathan Zuckerman; a voice you recognize, that you like and trust. Or no, a voice you want to like and trust.

I first encountered Michael Chabon in the form of a xeroxed page scotch-taped to a colleague's office door. The page came from his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, and it began with the young narrator's admission of his "ugly fondness for generalizations," a fondness indulged in his explanation as to why "there is always something weird about a girl who majors in French." As a passage on an office door, it was sharp enough, and it made me remember its author's name. Chabon was only 24 when his novel was published, not much older than his narrator, and his publishers did well by playing up his youth; the book was a great commercial success, and his stories became a feature of *The New Yorker* of the late '80s.

What made Chabon so attractive was the way his writing ran counter to the dominant trends of the decade. He didn't offer the plotless strip-mall desperation of American minimalism, the affectless present-tense prose of the school of Carver. Nor was the book set in the McInerney-Ellis world of clubs and Quaaludes, in which moral distinctions call for too much energy. It was refreshing to find a young writer who didn't seem afraid of style, whose work was strongly voiced and vigorously plotted. And it didn't hurt that *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* provided a variation on a very familiar form: the novel of maturation, in which a nice young man has to declare his independence of an imposing father who happened, in this case, to be a gangster.

Chabon's new novel covers much of the same terrain. It, too, is written in the first person and set around a university in Pittsburgh, and though its narrator is the fortysomething Grady Tripp, a teacher of creative writing, the novel maintains its predecessor's wide-eyed fascination with the rituals of undergraduate life. (This is the only published novel I know that describes the drinking games of my own college fraternity.) *Wonder Boys*, too, has been extravagantly praised, its author hailed as "the brightly shining hope" of American letters. And there is much to admire here. Chabon can write a good scene, deftly setting his characters in collision with one another. He is good on a world gone out of fashion, old cars and older music and the kind of "classic Pittsburgh establishments ... that deal in rendering vats, piroshki presses, artificial wigs, and that regardless of the hour or day of the week always look as if they have been closed since the death of Guy Lombardo."

Those opening sentences about August Van Zorn lead not only to a memorable account of the lost paradise of the pulps, but also to an evocation of what Grady calls "the midnight disease" that so marks a writer's life, a sickness whose symptoms are the rocking chair and the whiskey bottle and "the staring eye, lucid with insomnia even in the daytime." Grady himself caught the disease as a Kerouac-bitten teenager in the late '60s

> and had conceived the usual picture of myself as an outlaw-poet-pathfinder, a kind of Zen-masterly John C. Fremont on amphetamines with a marbled dime-store pad of lined paper in the back pocket of my denim pants. I still see myself that way, I suppose, and I'm probably none the better for it. Dutifully I thumbed the rides, hopped the B&Os and the Great Northerns, balled the lithe small-town girls in the band shells of their hometown parks, held the jobs and field hand and day laborer and soda jerk, saw the crude spectacles of American landscape slide past me as I lay in an open boxcar and drank cheap red wine; and if I didn't, I might as well have.

Balled. That's the proper word, the '60s word that nobody really uses anymore. Grady's sense of himself here as a cliché, the irony with which he sees his own romanticism, is just right.

What feels off is the way the richness of his style cushions that irony, and turns it soft. For finally Chabon's hero believes in those clichés. *Wonder Boys* aspires to a cynicism about the literary life that it can't quite sustain, as if inside a writer like Martin Amis somebody like Thomas Wolfe were struggling to get out, "filled with the dread and mystery of the books" that he believes himself "destined to write." The novel is a picaresque account of Grady's lost weekend: the one on which he seems to throw his life away, only to find it again (of course) in the

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book's closing pages. For years he's been struggling with a manuscript called, no surprise, "Wonder Boys," 2,600 pages of life in a Pennsylvania town, a book he can't finish for two reasons. First, because its world contains "too many terrible genetic and fiduciary secrets to dig up and bury and dig up again, too many divorces to grant, heirs to disinherit, trysts to arrange." And second, because he blows too much weed.

Now his editor and old friend Terry Crabtree is coming to town for a literary festival, and Grady has to have something to show him. He tries to slap on a last chapter; or five of them. When Crabtree gets off the plane, he's accompanied by a woman in five-inch heels who turns out to be a man. (Why the straight Grady recognizes a drag queen, and the bisexual Crabtree does not, remains one of these mysteries of Pittsburgh.) Incidents follow: the shooting of a large dog, the theft of the black satin jacket in which Marilyn Monroe married Joe DiMaggio, several seductions, encounters with the police, an accident with a snake. Marijuana is smoked and bourbon is drunk and Grady's lover announces that she is pregnant. Oh, and his wife leaves him. (The transvestite disappears on page 98 and plays no further role in this novel.)

All this reminds me of the rollicking pace sustained by Michael Malone, author of *Handling Sin* and *Foolscap* and a seriously underrated comic novelist; and while the book never seems quite as funny as it should be, you do turn the pages. One by one its scenes are vivid and concrete; and its combination of laughter and heartbreak, the way in which, as Grady's marriage cracks, everybody around him just tries to go on about their business, is admirable. But *Wonder Boys* suffers from precisely the kind of problem that Grady is having with his own "Wonder Boys." What about that transvestite? Given how quickly she's abandoned, why is he here in the first place? *Wonder Boys* is a kitchen sink, full of bits and pieces of plot that flicker for a few pages and then gutter out. Its events seem bound only by chronology, and yet Chabon doesn't claim any kind of logic for either the sheer linearity or the contingency of his characters' lives.

About halfway I began to wonder if there might be a shapely 200-pager buried inside this loose and baggy monster; but the real problem with *Wonder Boys* lies with Grady himself. Do we really want another novel about a writer messing up his life, especially a novel written in the kind of ingratiating "I-know-I'm-an-asshole" voice that begs our indulgence because the narrator is, after all, a novelist? This is the kind of delight in immaturity that has so often marked the male American writer in the past.

What compensation the novel offers for that banality lies in the fact that both Grady and Chabon—in this they are indistinguishable—seem to have the gift of precise and knowing observation. Certainly that was the attraction of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*. Still, when I looked once again at that memorable page about the "terrible consequences" of studying French, not on an office door but within the novel itself, it seemed like, well, something you'd stick on an office door. And the more I thought about it, the less Chabon's description seemed to bear any relation whatsoever to any French major I've known.

Reading *Wonder Boys*, I found myself measuring Grady's observations against my own experience. He describes the face of his lover as "freckled and pale and alive with the look of disappointment that often haunts the difficult faces of redheaded women." Do redheaded women have especially difficult faces? Do they look any more disappointed than women who don't have red hair? One of Grady's Jewish Korean in-laws has an "insincere" voice, for "like many people who have lost all but the ghost of their original foreign accents, nothing she said ever sounded quite true." What? The least one can ask of a knowing voice is that it know what it is talking about. Chabon's book does not quite deserve the trust it demands. In this novel Joe DiMaggio's hitting streak happened in 1947.

Maybe that wouldn't matter so much if Grady were an unreliable narrator, but he isn't. The novel posits a distinction between Grady the self-destructive character and Grady the storyteller, spinning his narrative from the vantage point of a few years on: subdued but sober, married again and with a son to take care of, "Wonder Boys" abandoned, his literary ambitions held firmly in check. But the distinction is never believably shown. The romanticism and the purple patches are as much a part of the narrator as they are of the character, and so the narrator never quite sees the character with the irony that the latter deserves. Grady's voice seems finally false, overwritten and yet not fully inhabited, as if Chabon were striving for a resonant maturity he cannot quite maintain.

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TRB *continued from page 4*

England kept its divorce rate near zero with the help of shame—notably the shame heaped on men who deserted their families. Such men had trouble, for example, getting elected to office.

Incidentally, the two Democrats Dole cites as allies in the war against pop immorality—Senators Bill Bradley and Paul Simon—claim only one wife each. More counterintuitively still, it is a Democrat, Representative Ed Markey, who understands markets well enough to have launched a demand-side attack on pop-culture violence. The idea behind his "V-chip" is to let parents keep violent shows out of their TV sets.

The V-chip's recent travails well illustrate Republican moral phoniness. All TV makers have now agreed to build at least one model with a V-chip. The networks just need to cooperate by transmitting, in digital code, the "viewer discretion advised" warnings they already broadcast in English. But they refuse. They're happy to gravely intone "warnings" that will in truth raise viewership, especially among unattended kids; but sending the same warning digitally, alas, could actually succeed in doing its job.

Broadcasters make campaign contributions. And this year when Markey floated an amendment that would have made certain broadcast license renewals contingent on sending viewer discretion advisories digitally, *every Republican on the commerce committee* voted against it. And several of these Republicans had cosponsored a V-chip bill before the networks got so vocal in their opposition. The amendment died by a 32-15 vote.

Dole is now shepherding through the senate a telecommunications bill that could easily accommodate a comparable V-chip provision. For that matter, Dole could also champion another demand-side strategy. Some day, private-sector "ratings services" will grade TV shows and movies for violence, nudity, profanity, whatever. Parents will subscribe to the service that best reflects their values; they will periodically download TV-set software that blocks out offensive shows after identifying them by the serial numbers now used to program "smart" VCRs. The government could hasten the advent of this technology with a bit of minor standard-setting and incentive-providing. Such regulation, though troubling to a few industry execs, would have widespread voter appeal if Dole turned it into a high-profile part of his family values campaign. Indeed, the net gain in political capital would be so large that this wouldn't even qualify as leadership. Take it away, Bob.

ROBERT WRIGHT

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WEST COAST DIARIST

Civic ceremonies

MY WIFE AND I CAME TO VANcouver to participate in the opening of the new central library, a building the design for which reflects both elevated purpose and the routine requirements of mass use. The architect is our friend Moshe Safdie, whose distinctive signature—an unintimidating grandeur—is part of the landscape and skyscape from Los Angeles to Jerusalem. In recent years Safdie has focused his imagination on crafting environments for institutions that bridge the past to the future. His two religious commissions in my hometown, Harvard's Hillel House and a nondenominational chapel at the Harvard Business School, are subtle mediations, and meditations, between faith and the impatient lives of modern men and women. Safdie's work is not one of those post-modern constructions in the brutish style, which are themselves another expression of this impatience.

THIS LIBRARY, HOWEVER, EVOKES the classical and the democratic as a public library should. Many observers were reminded of the coliseum in Rome and some critics complained that this trope was inapt. I thought, more generically, of amphitheaters where ordinary people experienced the elevated drama of ordinary emotions, of the *cardos* in the cities of empire, soaring, binding and functional. Safdie's design was chosen through the usual competition by the usual government agencies. But more than 7,000 citizens made their views known, too, and it was they who understood that this library would welcome, stretch and embolden its users, provide them with light and congenial space, allow them a cup of coffee and a venue for talk, challenge but not daunt.

THE DEDICATION WAS A GREAT civic event as befits a great civic purpose. On Sunday, hundreds of users, young and old, formed a human chain and passed thousands of books from the old building to the new. Maybe such a ceremony for a comparable facility could still be held in a few large American cities, but probably only in those where public life had not yet been poisoned by identity politics. Maybe in Lincoln, Nebraska. For me—New York bred and Bostonian by choice—the Vancouver fest conjured up nostalgia for what predates my actual memory. The assembled citizenry and the politicians who addressed them seem to believe in the reading of books, in the expansion of minds through reading. There were no nods to multiculturalism, those rituals of deference which in our country are really signs of rancor and coercion, where everything, even the choice of a celebratory song, is a subject of dispute. But Vancouver is a multiracial and multi-ethnic city, where the idea of Canada is certainly more alive than the idea of America is in New York.

ONE IDEA THAT IS CERtainly dead everywhere is the United Nations, although the news will be delayed until the end of this year, which is the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. The first place to mark the occasion was San Francisco, where the U.N. charter was actually signed. At a *kulturnya* extravaganza late last month thirteen dance ensembles from here, there, and everywhere were supposed to produce new wares for the occasion, and, for some reason, the Bolshoi was given the opening performance. Its first number was, at least, according to *The Financial Times*, metaphorically apt. A solo showpiece, it featured a scampering Russian jester not unlike the Soviet diplomatic jesters who once pretended at the U.N. to care about this and that, peace and democracy, for example—but intended none of it.

THE U.N.'S FEST AT FIFTY COULD not occur at a less auspicious time. Its affairs have been stewarded by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a certified charlatan and intriguer, who, nearing 74, wants five more years on the thirty-eighth floor overlooking the East River and (not to be ignored) the stately townhouse off Sutton Place that is a perk of office. Why not? Were you a Coptic Christian, would you want to go back to Egypt, where Copts are targets of Muslim millenialism, even if you were, as the secretary-general is, immensely wealthy? Don't get me wrong: the secretary-general has expressed his solidarity with the immensely poor. It is he, after all, who first put the kibosh on international action for Bosnia, saying its people, being European, were privileged and, thus, less needy than Africans. Not that he was much help to the Africans, either. Dependent entirely on U.S. help in Somalia (which eventually dried up), the U.N. failed in getting supplies into Rwanda, where the casualties were even higher, even when the money had been approved for months.

THE U.N. ANNIVERSARY HAS ATtracted its share of hustles. One of these is a San Francisco-based campaign to purchase—a better word would be "ransom"—the actual signed documents of the U.N. Charter which disappeared sometime after 1946. The seller, who wants $3 million, is anonymous. Then there are the usual souvenirs and knickknacks: U.N. T-shirts, U.N. sweatshirts, U.N. coffee mugs, U.N. baseball bats, all for sale for under $45 at Macy's, Union Square. You can't wear a T-shirt to the reception at the M.H. de Young Museum on June 24 when the entire United Nations will descend on the city. But there is a respectable alternative for the privileged San Franciscans invited. At oh-so-chic Hermes, on Stockton Street, they can buy, at $225 apiece, their special U.N. commemorative scarf in blue with doves of peace flying around. Tell that to the Bosnians.

BAD-MOUTHING THE U.N. is said by the pundits to be a monopoly franchise of the Republicans. But that just leaves to us Democrats the defense of another spoiled and despised idea, one more in a series, like affirmative action and abortion on demand. Just as the impending death of these two mantras-turned-into-policies will not spell doom for integration—not by a long shot—or for reasonable choice, the withering away of the U.N. won't translate into a warrant for aggressors. On the contrary: this withering away would restore the moral and real authority of the peaceful democracies—the only can-do powers in the international system anyway—against the hobbling impediments of the tyrants and war-makers whose interests are otherwise permanent structural features of the U.N. regime.

I WILL HAVE NO NOSTALGIA FOR the U.N. It is lumbering and pretentious. It is now, in fact, complicit in Bosnia in one of the greater evils of the last half-century. It cannot be reformed. So preserve UNICEF and the World Health Organization, which do good work and, for the most part, independently of the U.N.'s bloated apparatus. But for the rest: let it all sink. Good riddance. U.N. headquarters in Manhattan would be better used as a school or as a residential space for the homeless, and the great rotunda auditorium of the General Assembly ought to be designated a theater—but not for the theater of the absurd. Then there'd be something to celebrate. And New York might actually have a civic event.

MARTIN PERETZ

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